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## **STUDIES OF A BIOGRAPHER**





# Studies of a Biographer

By  
Leslie Stephen

In Four Volumes  
Volume IV.

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## STUDIES OF A BIOGRAPHER

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### Shakespeare as a Man

I AM reluctant to break the rule—or what ought to be the rule—that no one should write about Shakespeare without a special license. Heaven-born critics or thorough antiquaries alone should add to the pile under which his “honoured bones” are but too effectually hidden. I make no pretence of having discovered a new philosophical meaning in *Hamlet*, or of having any light to throw upon the initials “W. H.” I confess, too, that, though I have read Shakespeare with much pleasure, I cannot say as much for most of his commentators. I have not studied them eagerly. I spent, however, some hours of a recent vacation in reading a few Shakespeare books, including Mr. Lee’s already standard *Life* and Professor Brandes’ interesting *Critical Study*. The contrast between the two raised an old question. Mr. Lee, like many critics of the highest authority, maintains that we can know nothing of the man. He shows that we know more than the average reader

supposes of the external history of the Stratford townsman. But then he maintains the self-denying proposition that such knowledge teaches us nothing about the author of *Hamlet*. Professor Brandes, on the contrary, tries to show how a certain spiritual history indicated by the works may be more or less distinctly correlated with certain passages in the personal history. The process, of course, involves a good deal of conjecture. It rests upon the assumption that the works, when properly interpreted, reveal character; for the facts taken by themselves are a manifestly insufficient ground for more than a few negative inferences. If, with Mr. Lee, we regard the first step as impossible, the whole theory must collapse. Upon his showing, we learn little from the works except that Shakespeare, whatever he may have been as a man, had a marvellous power of wearing different masks. There is no reason to suppose that his mirth or melancholy, his patriotism or his misanthropy, reveal his own sentiments. He could inspire his puppets with the eloquence which would bring down the house and direct money to the till of the Globe. He could drop his mask and become a commonplace man of business when he applied for a coat of arms or requested his debtors to settle their little accounts.

This raises the previous question of the possi-

bility of the general inference from the book to the man. Now I confess that to me one main interest in reading is always the communion with the author. *Paradise Lost* gives me the sense of intercourse with Milton, and the Waverley Novels bring me a greeting from Scott. Every author, I fancy, is unconsciously his own Boswell, and, however "objective" or dramatic he professes to be, really betrays his own secrets. Browning is one of the authorities against me. If Shakespeare, he says, really unlocked his heart in the sonnets, why, "the less Shakespeare he." Browning declines for his part to follow the example, and fancies that he has preserved his privacy. Yet we must, I think, agree with a critic who emphatically declares that a main characteristic of Browning's own poetry is that it brings us into contact with the real "self of the author." Self-revelation is not the less clear because involuntary or quite incidental to the main purpose of a book. I may read Gibbon simply to learn facts; but I enjoy his literary merits because I recognise my friend of the autobiography who "sighed as a lover and obeyed as a son." I may study Darwin's *Origin of Species* to clear my views upon natural selection; but as a book it interests me even through the defects of style by the occult personal charm of the candid, sagacious, patient seeker for truth.



In pure literature the case is, of course, plainer, and I will not count up instances because, in truth, I can hardly think of a clear exception. Whenever we know a man adequately we perceive that, though different aspects of his character may be made prominent in his life and his works, the same qualities are revealed in both, and we cannot describe the literary without indicating the personal charm.

Is Shakespeare the sole exception? There are obvious difficulties in the way of a satisfactory answer. Shakespearian criticism means too often reckless competition in hyperboles. So long as critics think it necessary to show their appreciative power by falling into hysterics, all distinctive characteristics are obliterated. When the poet is lost in such a blaze of light, we can make no inference to the man. Sometimes out of reverence for his genius he is treated like a prophet whose inspiration is proved by his commonplace character in other moments. The more impossible an explanation, the greater will be the wonder. Some commentators, again, have displayed their affection by dwelling upon his proverbial "gentleness," till he seems to be a kind of milksop with no more of the devil in him than there was in the poet of *The Christian Year*. Others have been so impressed by the vigour of his



fine frenzies, and the "irregularities" of which our forefathers complained, that they describe him as always on the border of insanity. Such discords do not prove necessarily that the man was unknowable, but certainly suggest that to know him a critic must keep his head and be less anxious to exhibit his own enthusiasm and geniality than to form a tolerably sane judgment. The application of sound methods happily seems to be spreading, and may lead to more solid results.

Some objections, indeed, if they could be sustained, would make the investigation impossible from the first. Shakespeare, we are reminded with undeniable truth, was a dramatist. We cannot assume that he is responsible for the opinions which he formulates. It is Orsino, not his creator, who holds that wives should be younger than their husbands, and Shakespeare may not have been thinking of Anne Hathaway. Some of us have personal reasons for hoping that when his characters express a dislike for the lean or for the unmusical their words do not give his deliberate judgment. If this were a fatal difficulty it would follow that no competent dramatist reveals himself in his works. Yet, as a matter of fact, I suppose that dramatists are generally quite as knowable as other authors. We learn to know Ben Jonson from his plays alone, almost as well



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blackier. A perfectly impartial analysis of character is, surely, the true method of showing what is lovable in the virtuous and hateful in the vicious, and the man who gets angry with his own creatures, and denounces instead of explaining, is really perverting the true moral. When Cervantes makes us love Don Quixote in spite of the crack in his intellect and the absurdity of his career, he is really setting forth in the most effective way the beauty of the chivalrous character. That, I take it, is the true artistic method. It simply displays the facts and leaves the reader to be attracted or repelled according to his power of appreciating moral beauty or deformity. But, undoubtedly, so far as this method is characteristic of Shakespeare's work, it increases our difficulty. These are the facts, he says: make what you can of them; I do not draw the moral for you, or even deny that many very different morals may commend themselves to different people. No great poet can be without some implicit morality, though the morality may be sometimes very bad. He is great because he has a rich emotional nature, and great powers of observation and insight. He must have his own views of what are the really valuable elements in life, of what constitutes true happiness, and what part the deepest instincts play in the general course of affairs. He must therefore

have his answer to the great problems of ethics. But we have to translate his implicit convictions into an abstract theory in order to discover his moral system. To do that in the case of Shakespeare would no doubt be a specially difficult and delicate task. He refuses to give us any direct help towards divining his sympathies. Scott, in his most Shakespearian moods, has something of the same impartiality. When he describes an interesting person, Louis XI. in *Quentin Durward*, or James I. in *The Fortunes of Nigel*, he shows a power of insight, of making wicked and weak men intelligible and human, which reminds us of Shakespeare's methods. He hated Covenanters like a good Jacobite, and yet he can describe them kindly and sympathetically. But then he has sympathies which he cannot conceal. His love of the manly, healthy type represented in the Dandie Dinmonts and their like reveals the man, and, without reading Lockhart, we can see that, unlike Shakespeare, he is clearly identifying himself with some of his characters.

My inference then would be, not that Shakespeare cannot be known, but that a knowledge of Shakespeare must be attained through a less obvious process. His character, we must suppose, was highly complex, and we are without the direct and unequivocal clues which enable us to feel

ourselves personally acquainted with such men as Dante or Milton, to say nothing of Wordsworth or Byron. A distinction, however, must be made. There is such a thing as knowing a man thoroughly and yet being unable to put our knowledge into definite formulæ. I may know a man's face and the sound of his voice well enough to swear to him among a thousand others, and yet I may be totally unable to describe him in such a way as to enable a detective to pick him out of a crowd. I can say that he is six feet high and has a red beard, but I cannot give the finer marks which distinguish tall red-bearded men from each other. So I can often divine instinctively what my friend will say and do and think on a given occasion, and yet be quite unable to give the reasons for my expectation. If I am not a trained psychologist, I shall not have the proper terms, or shall confuse different terms; and if I am a trained psychologist, I may too probably be misled by my own theories, and I shall certainly find that all the common phrases by which we describe character are too vague and shifting to reflect the vast variety of delicate shades of emotional temperament which we can yet recognise in observation. Does not every critic of poetry claim such a knowledge—vivid and yet difficult to grasp and analyse? He professes to recognise Shakespeare's



style; he can tell you confidently which plays are Shakespeare's own, and which he produced in collaboration with others; he can point out the scene and even the particular speech at which Shakespeare dropped the pen and Fletcher took it up. Part of this knowledge is derived, it is true, from "objective" signs. One scene has a larger percentage than others of verses with eleven syllables. That observation requires no critical insight. Yet I do not suppose that any critic would admit that he was unable to discriminate qualities too delicate to be inferred from counting on the fingers. The point of which I am speaking corresponds to the distinction made by Newman in the *Grammar of Assent* between the "Illative Instinct" and such formal reasoning as can be put into syllogisms. He illustrates it by Falstaff's "babbling of green fields." Some readers, he says, are certain that this was Shakespeare's phrase, while others hold that they do not recognise the true Shakespearian ring. The certitude of either side is therefore not conclusive for the other. Yet the conviction implies that each reader has so vivid a conception of certain characteristics that the verdict "This is" or "This is not Shakespearian" arises spontaneously at a particular phrase. "Shakespearian," then, must have a definite though not definable meaning.



Something in the turn of thought, in the play of humour, fits in or does not exactly fit in with our image, and we must therefore have such an image—whether like or unlike to the reality.

- Two difficulties, in fact, are often confounded: the difficulty of knowing and the difficulty of analysing and formulating our knowledge. Language is too rough and equivocal an instrument to enable us to communicate to others the finer shades of difference which we can clearly recognise.
- Critics, I fancy, were it not for their characteristic modesty, might be induced by a skilful cross-examination to confess that their knowledge of Shakespeare is much more precise and distinct than they venture to claim. If I had the skill required for the most difficult form of literary art, I should try to surmount their diffidence by a Socratic dialogue. I should not endeavour to reveal new truths to them, but endeavour, like Socrates, to deliver them of the truths with which their judgments are already pregnant. Much as critics of the poetry differ, they show a tendency to converge; there are certain commonplaces, and at least as many negations, in which they would agree. As I do not profess to be an expert, I must
- limit myself to such generalities. What I would try to show is that what is accepted about the poetry really implies certain conclusions about



the man. I must leave it to those who unite more thorough knowledge with more poetical insight to fill up the rough outlines which are all I can attempt to indicate.

One remark will be granted: A dramatist is no more able than anybody else to bestow upon his characters talents which he does not himself possess. If—as critics are agreed—Shakespeare’s creatures show humour, Shakespeare must have had a sense of humour himself. When Mercutio indulges in the wonderful tirade upon Queen Mab, or Jaques moralises in the forest, we learn that their creator had certain powers of mind just as clearly as if we were reading a report of one of the wit combats at the “Mermaid.” It is harder to define those qualities precisely than to say what is implied by Johnson’s talk at the “Mitre,” but the idiosyncrasy is at least as strongly impressed upon such characteristic mental displays. If we were to ask any critic whether such passages could be attributed to Marlowe or Ben Jonson, he would inquire whether we took him for a fool. If, indeed, we were considering a bit of scientific exposition, the inference as to character would not exist. A mathematician, I suppose, could tell me that the demonstration of some astronomical theorem was in Newton’s manner, and the remark would not show whether Newton was amiable or

spiteful, jealous or generous. But a man's humour and fancy are functions of his character as well as of his reason. To appreciate them clearly is to know how he feels as well as how he argues; what are the aspects of life which especially impress him, and what morals are most congenial. I do not see how the critic can claim an instinctive perception of the Shakespearian mode of thought without a perception of some sides of his character. You distinguish Shakespeare's work from his rivals' as confidently as any expert judging of handwriting. You admit, too, that you can give a very fair account of the characteristics of the other writers. Then surely you can tell me—or at least you know "implicitly"—what is the quality in which they are defective and Shakespeare pre-eminent.

Half my knowledge of a friend's character is derived from his talk, and not the less if it is playful, ironical, and dramatic. When we agree that Shakespeare's mind was vivid and subtle, that he shows a unique power of blending the tragic and the comic, we already have some indications of character; and incidentally we catch revelations of more specific peculiarities. Part of my late reading was a charming book in which Mr. Justice Madden sets forth Shakespeare's accurate knowledge of field sports. It seems to prove con-

clusively a proposition against which there can certainly be no presumption. We may be quite confident that he could thoroughly enjoy a day's coursing on the Cotswold Hills, and we know by the most undeniable proof that his sense of humour was tickled by the oddities of his fellow-sportsmen, the Shallows and Slenders. It is at least equally clear that he had the keenest enjoyment of the charms of the surrounding scenery. He could not have written *Midsummer Night's Dream* or *As You Like It* if the poetry of the English greenwood had not entered his soul. The single phrase about the daffodils—so often quoted for its magical power—is proof enough, if there were no other, of a nature exquisitely sensitive to the beauties of flowers and of springtime. It wants, again, no such confirmation as Fuller's familiar anecdote to convince us that Shakespeare could enjoy convivial meetings at taverns, that he could listen to, and probably join in, a catch by Sir Toby Belch, or make Lord Southampton laugh as heartily as Prince Hal laughed at the jests of Falstaff. Shakespeare, again, as this suggests, was certainly not a Puritan. That may be inferred by judicious critics from particular phrases or from the relations of Puritans to players in general. But without such reasoning we may go further and say that the very conception of a

Puritan Shakespeare involves a contradiction in terms. He represents, of course, in the fullest degree, the type which is just the antithesis of Puritanism; the large and tolerant acceptance of human nature which was intolerable to the rigid and strait-laced fanatics, whom, nevertheless, we may forgive in consideration of their stern morality. People, indeed, have argued, very fruitlessly I fancy, as to Shakespeare's religious beliefs. Critics tell us, and I have no doubt truly, that it would be impossible to show conclusively from his works whether he considered himself to be an Anglican or a Catholic. But a man's religion is not to be defined by the formula which he accepts, or inferred even from the church to which he belongs. That is chiefly a matter of accident and circumstance, not of character. The same essential religious sentiments may be clothed in the most various and even logically contradictory creeds. We may, I think, be pretty certain that Shakespeare's religion, whatever may have been its external form, included a profound sense of the mystery of the world and of the pettiness of the little lives that are rounded by a sleep; a conviction that we are such stuff as dreams are made of, and a constant sense, such as is impressed in the most powerful sonnets, that our best life is an infinitesimal moment in the vast

"abysm" of eternity. Shakespeare, we know, read Montaigne; and if, like Montaigne, he accepted the creed in which he was brought up, he would have sympathised in Montaigne's sceptical and humorous view of theological controversialists playing their fantastic tricks of logic before high Heaven. Undoubtedly, he despised a pedant, and the pedantry which displayed itself in the wranglings of Protestant and Papist divines would clearly not have escaped his contempt. Critics, again, have disputed as to Shakespeare's politics; and the problem is complicated by the desire to show that his politics were as good as his poetry. Sound Liberals are unwilling to admit that he had aristocratic tendencies, because they hold that all aristocrats are wicked and narrow-minded. It is, of course, an anachronism to transplant our problems to those days, and we cannot say what Shakespeare would have thought of modern applications of the principles which he accepted. But I do not see how any man could have been more clearly what may be called an intellectual aristocrat. His contempt for the mob may be good-humoured enough, but is surely unequivocal: from the portrait of Jack Cade promising, like a good Socialist, that the three-hooped pot shall have ten hoops, to the first, second, and third citizens who give a display of their inanity and

instability in *Coriolanus* or *Julius Cæsar*. Shakespeare may be speaking dramatically through Ulysses in *Troilus and Cressida*; but at least he must have fully appreciated the argument for order, and understood by order that the cultivated and intelligent should rule and the common herd have as little direct voice in state affairs as Elizabeth and James could have desired.

When we have got so far, we have already, as it seems to me, admitted certain attributes which are as much personal as literary. If you admit that Shakespeare was a humourist, intensely sensitive to natural beauty, a scorner of the pedantry, whether of scholars or theologians, endowed with an amazingly wide and tolerant view of human nature, radically opposed to Puritanism or any kind of fanaticism, capable of hearty sympathy with the popular instincts and yet with a strong persuasion of the depth of popular folly, you thereby know at least some negative propositions about the man himself. You can say with confidence what are the characteristics which were thoroughly antipathetic to him, even though it may be difficult to describe accurately the characteristics which he positively embodied.

Another point is, it would seem, too plain to need much emphasis. The author of *Romeo and*

*Juliet* was, I suppose, capable of Romeo's passion. We may "doubt that the sun is fire," but can hardly doubt that Shakespeare could love. In this case, it seems to me, the power of intuition is identical with the emotional power. A man would surely have been unable to find the most memorable utterance in literature of passions of which he was not himself abnormally susceptible. It may be right to describe a poet's power as marvellous, but why should we hold it to be miraculous? I agree with Pope's common-sense remark about Heloisa's "well-sung woes"—"he best can paint 'em who can feel 'em most." Surely that is the obvious explanation, and I am unable to see why there should be any difficulty in receiving it. When the blind poet Blacklock described scenery which he had never seen, wise critics puzzled over the phenomenon. It was explained by the obvious remark that he was simply appropriating the conventional phrases of other poets. But when a poet gives originality to the most commonplace of all themes, I infer that he has had the eyesight or felt the emotions required for the feat. We must, no doubt, be careful as to further differences. If I had read the poems of Burns or Byron without any knowledge of their lives, I should be justified, I think, in modestly inferring that they were men of strong passions.



I could not suppose that they were merely vamping up old material. No inference from conduct could be made more conclusive than the inference from the fire and force of their poetry. But it is, of course, doubtful what effect might be produced on their lives. Byron, brought up under judicious and firm management, might conceivably have become an affectionate husband and a respectable nobleman. Some men have greater powers of self-command than others, or may be prevented by other qualities of character from obeying in practice the impulses which govern their imaginations. It has been said that Moore, who in early days shocked his contemporaries by immoral poetry, lived the most domestic and well-regulated of lives; whereas Rogers was the most respectable of poets and a striking contrast to Moore in conduct. The fact, if it be a fact, may warn us against hasty conclusions. A man may have very good reasons for keeping some of his feelings out of his books; or may, out of mere levity, affect vices which he does not put in practice. We can be sure that he has certain propensities; but, of course, we cannot tell how far circumstance and other propensities may not hold them in check. Much smaller men than Shakespeare are still very complex organisms. We may judge from this and that symptom that they react, as a chemist may

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say, in certain ways to a given stimulus; but to put all the indications together, to say which are the dominant instincts and how different impulses will modify each other in active life; to decide whether a feeling which shapes the ideal world will have a corresponding force when it comes into contact with realities, is a delicate investigation. When an adequate biography is obtainable, the answer is virtually given. The facts of Shakespeare's life are as far as possible from adequate; but we may ask how far what is known can check or confirm inferences from the works.

This brings us to the biographical problem. Minute students of Shakespeare have done one great service at least. They have established approximately the order of his works. The plays when placed in a chronological series show probably the most remarkable intellectual development on record. There is, I suppose, no great writer who shows so distinctly the growth and varying direction of his poetical faculty. We watch Shakespeare from the start; beginning as a cobbler and adapter of other men's works; making a fresh start as a follower of Marlowe, and then improving upon his model in the great historical dramas. We can compare the gaiety and the ridicule of affectations in the early comedies with the more serious and penetrative portraits of life

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in the later works; or trace the development of his full powers in the great tragedies, and the mellower tone of the later romantic dramas. If some knowledge of Shakespeare is implied in a comparison between him and his contemporaries, there is still more significance in the comparison with himself. A century ago a critic put the *Two Gentlemen of Verona* at the end and the *Winter's Tale* at the beginning of his career. Such an inversion, we now perceive, would make the whole history of his mental development chaotic and contradictory. That Shakespeare, whom we know to have been a marvellously keen observer of life and character, and who lived, as literary historians so elaborately demonstrate, under the most stimulating intellectual and social conditions, must have had his reflections and learned some lessons about human life is self-evident. To show how, for example, *Richard II.*, in which he followed Marlowe, differed from the *Henry IV.*, in which he has found his own characteristic breadth and strength, is to show what some of those lessons were, and therefore to throw light upon the man who learned them so quickly. We see how certain veins of reflection become more prominent: how, for example, humour checks the bombastic tendency, and the broader and deeper view of life "begets a temperance" which restrains the "whirl-

wind" of ungovernable passions. The critic who can exhibit the growth of a man's power implicitly exhibits also the character which is developed; and, in fact, I think that by taking such considerations into account a clearer perception of the man has been gradually worked out. The task, no doubt, would be easier if we could strengthen our case by some definite biographical data; and the misfortune is that we are tempted to construct the required data by the help of audacious conjectures. The natural failure of such enterprises has unduly discredited the value of mere modest inferences.

The hope of unveiling the man has in particular led to the controversy over the sonnets. They are supposed to show that Shakespeare went through a spiritual crisis, which is indicated by the bitterness of some of the plays written at the time; and certain inferences would be applicable if we could safely identify the dark lady with Mistress Fitton and "W. H." with the Earl of Pembroke. I humbly accept Mr. Lee's chief conclusions. He has insisted upon the fact that Shakespeare was falling in with a temporary fashion, or infected by a curious mania which led poets just at that period to pour out sonnets by the hundred. The inference that the sonnets necessarily imply some personal catastrophe is thus

deprived of its force. If half the early Victorian poets had been writing *In Memoriams*, we might believe that Tennyson had no special friendship for Arthur Hallam, and had merely made a pretext of a commonplace attachment. It is possible, or rather it is highly probable, that Shakespeare took some real bit of personal history for a text, though many of the sonnets are simply variations upon established poetical themes. But we cannot say that his emotion must have been caused by some thrilling events when it is at least equally likely that he merely took a trifling event as a pretext for expressing his emotions. Shakespeare was certainly dramatist enough to discover a motive for poetry in a commonplace experience. The attempted identifications do little more than illustrate a common fallacy. The impossibility of proving a negative is confounded with the conclusive proof of the positive. "It is just possible" becomes "it is certainly true." The whole Pembroke-Fitton hypothesis rests (as Mr. Lee seems to show) upon the interpretation of the famous initials. The fact that a nobleman had an intrigue with a lady about the time when the sonnets, or some of them, may have been written, cannot prove that they refer to the intrigue. Shakespeare could hardly have managed to write at a period when some intrigue was not

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My wound is great, because it is so small,  
Then were it greater, were it none at all!

If there had been no dedication, the proof apparently would have been conclusive, because the reticence would have been absolute. The true argument is surely simple. If there were otherwise very strong reasons for believing in the Pembroke theory, it might be a plausible conjecture that the initials were suggested by association, though it would still be odd that reticence pushed so far did not go a step further. In the absence of such reasons, the obscurity cannot of itself be any ground for conviction. People forget how frequent are much closer and yet purely accidental coincidences; but when there is a chance of the glory of a discovery of such a bit of personal history, "trifles light as air" become demonstrative to enthusiastic worshippers.

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whole theory. Were it proved that the sonnets refer to the conjectured history, the fact would be interesting, but would hardly throw much light upon our problem. It is supposed to suggest a cause for Shakespeare's supposed pessimistic mood. To take a parallel case: we find an explanation of Swift's misanthropy in his long ordeal of disappointed ambition. There is no doubt whatever that Swift's writings express a misanthropy as savage as that of Timon or Thersites; and on the other side, there is no doubt that his career was calculated to sour his nature. Putting the history of the man and his works together, both become the more intelligible. The fierce indignation shown by the author is explained and palliated by the life of the man. If Shakespeare had suddenly retired from the stage and taken to writing pamphlets like the *Drapier's Letters* or the *Martin Marprelate Tracts*, we might admit the probability of some events which embittered his life. But then the conspicuous fact is that his life ran on, as far as we can tell, with perfect smoothness. Nobody can prove that he did not love Mistress Fitton; but it is quite clear that, if he did, it did not prevent him from making money, buying New Place, setting up as a gentleman, and continuing a thoroughly prosperous career. The passion clearly did not dislocate his career.

Even if the alleged fact be true, it had no permanent bearing on his life. On the other side, there is no proof of anything in the works to require explanation. Critics have indeed shown that at one period pessimistic sentiments (to speak roughly) become more prominent than before or afterward. But we must, in the first place, make the proper allowance for the dramatic condition. He may have continued the "Thersites" or "Timon" vein because it was popular or because it suited the acting of one of his "fellows." And in the next place the whole argument that a man must be gloomy because he writes of horrors or indulges in misanthropical tirades is questionable. Sometimes the opposite theory is more plausible. When we are young, and our nerves strong, we can bear excitement which becomes painful as our spirits fail; and in old age we like happy conclusions and soothing imagery, precisely because we are less cheerful. In any case, the works admittedly lose the pessimistic tone in the later years; and the presumption is that if Shakespeare suffered from any moral convulsion, he was fortunate enough to be thoroughly cured. The conjectured story, if so, is required, if at all, by the sonnets alone. When we make proper allowance for the degree in which they were suggested by the contemporary fashion and were



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The more modest inference, however, remains. If we can infer from his poetry that Shakespeare could be in love, we can surely infer with equal confidence that he could feel the emotions which embody themselves in pessimism. He had, one cannot doubt, satisfied the familiar condition of acquaintance with the heavenly powers. He knew what it was to eat his bread with sorrow and pass his nights in weeping. No one, I suppose, ever read the famous catalogue of the evils which made him pine for restful death, or the reference to the degrading influences of his profession, without feeling that a real man is speaking to us from his own experience. The poetical "intuition," as I must again hold, does not supersede the necessity for assuming the intense sensibility of which it is

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Shakespeare's conduct and the theory of life implied by his writings?

I leave a full answer to the accomplished critic whom I desiderate but do not try to anticipate. Yet, keeping to the region of tolerably safe commonplaces, I fancy that this supposed antithesis really admits of, or rather suggests, a natural mode of conciliation. Emerson laments, what we all admit, that Shakespeare was not a preacher with a mission. He had no definite ethical system to inculcate; and, moreover, so far as we can define his morality, it was not such as would satisfy the ideal saint. If he clearly did not agree with John Knox, we may doubt whether he would have appreciated St. Francis. Martyrs and ascetics would have been out of place in his world. The exalted idealist despises fact: he is impressive precisely because his doctrine is impracticable: the ideal may stimulate what is best in us, but it is too refined and exalted to be accepted by the mass. But Shakespeare does not idealise in the sense of neglecting the actual. He is intensely interested in the world as it is, moved by the great forces of love, hate, jealousy, ambition, pride, and patriotism. He "idealises" so far as he has a keener insight than any one into the corresponding types of character, but he does not care, so far as we can see, for the religious enthu-

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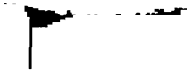
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To sound what stop she please: Give me that man  
That is not passion's slave, and I will wear him

In my heart's core, ay, in my heart of heart,  
As I do thee.

In a world so full of passion and violence, the essential condition of happiness is the power of keeping your head. They, as he says in a remarkable sonnet, "who moving others are themselves as stone," are the right inheritors of "Heaven's graces." The one character who, as commentators agree, represents a personal enthusiasm is Henry V., and Henry V.'s special peculiarity is his superlative self-command. It is emphasised even at some cost of dramatic propriety. Critics at least have complained of the soliloquy—

I know you all, and will a while uphold  
The unyoked humour of your idleness,

in which the prince expresses a deliberate intention of throwing off his wild companions. He is talking to the audience, it is suggested, and should not have so clear a theory of motives which he would scarcely avow to himself. I fancy indeed that many young gentlemen have indulged in similar excuses for the process of sowing their wild oats, and the main peculiarity of Henry V. is that he really means them and keeps to his resolution. Shakespeare obviously expects us to approve the exile of Falstaff, and rather scandalises




readers who have fallen in love with that disreputable person. A similar moral is implied in others of the most characteristic plays. Shakespeare, for example, sympathises most heartily and unmistakably with the pride of Coriolanus and the passionate energy of Mark Antony. They are admirable and attractive because they have such hot blood in their veins; but come to grief because the blood is not "commingled" with judgment. The really enviable thing, he seems to say, would be to unite the two characteristics: to be full of energy which shall yet be always well in hand; to have unbounded strength of passion and yet never to be the slave of passion.

If this be a characteristic impression, it is an obvious suggestion that it is illustrated by Shakespeare's life. The young lad from the country had the same temptations as Robert Greene and Christopher Marlowe. He did not escape them by any coldness of temperament or inability to appreciate the pleasures of the town. He may, as two or three stories suggest, have given way to weaknesses, which would account for some of the expressions of remorse in the sonnets. Anyhow, he had retained enough prudence and self-command to avoid the fate of a Pistol or a Falstaff. He became a highly respectable man as well as a world-poet. If he caught some stains from bad



company, they were, as I may leave the critics to demonstrate, superficial. The appreciation of pure and lofty qualities develops, instead of declining, as years go on. It surely cannot be said that an eye for the main chance is inconsistent with the poetical character. The conventional poet, of course, lives in dreamland, and is an incapable man of business. But then it is the specialty of Shakespeare, that if he could dream, he must have been most keenly awake to a living world of men. Interest in and insight into our fellow-creatures is surely a good qualification for business. Voltaire was a superlative man of business. Goethe knew the value of a good social position. Pope was a keen and successful money-maker. Dickens showed a similar capacity. Such cases may show that men can reconcile literary genius with business aptitudes. In one respect they may fall short of the case. They do not imply the actual preference of "gain" to "glory" attributed to Shakespeare. The closer parallel is, of course, Scott. If Scott's enjoyment of Abbotsford led to his ruin, while Shakespeare's more modest ambition was satisfied by New Place, the difference may have been that in the earlier period the arts of manufacturing paper credit were not so well understood. Still, Scott's estimate of the really valuable element of life naturally suggests



Shakespeare. He held that the man of action was superior to the man of letters. He wondered that the Duke of Wellington should condescend to an interest in the author of a few "bits of novels." He meant frankly to make money by providing harmless amusement; but he did not fancy that the achievements of a novelist were comparable to the winning of battles or the making of laws. Shakespeare, we may guess, would have agreed. Like Scott, he held aloof from literary squabbles, whether from good-nature or from worldly wisdom, or from a sense of the pettiness of such contentions. He had his literary vanity, but it was to be satisfied by the poems and by the circulation of the sonnets in manuscript. The plays were in the first instance pot-boilers. He could not help putting his power into them when the situation laid hold of his imagination; but the haste, the frequent flagging of interest, the curious readiness with which he sometimes forgives a character or accepts an unsatisfactory catastrophe, tends to show a singular indifference. In the greatest plays the inspiration lasts throughout; but in most he does not take the trouble to keep up to the highest level.

I need not ask whether the opinions attributed to Scott and Shakespeare are defensible. Some people, I know, consider that "devotion to art"

is the cardinal virtue, and that it is better to turn out a good poem and starve than to write down to the public and pay your bills. That is an old controversy; but, at any rate, Shakespeare's view is in character. He was never blind to the humourist's point of view, and humour has its questionable ethical quality. It helps some people to see the charm of the simple "faith miscalled simplicity," and Shakespeare's cordial appreciation of a fool shows one side of an amiable disposition. But a saint can hardly be a humourist. It is his nature to take things seriously, and to believe (bold as it appears) in the power of sermons. The humourist sees with painful distinctness the folly of the wise and the weakness of the hero and the general perversity of fortune. He may be capable of enthusiasm, or, at least, sympathy with the enthusiastic; but he feels that there is always a lurking irony in the general order of things. He is specially conscious of the vanity of his own ambition, and aware that his highest success makes a very small ripple on the great ocean of existence. Shakespeare had the good (though not rare) fortune of living before his commentators. His head, therefore, was not turned, and he held, we may suppose, that to defeat the Armada was a more important bit of work than to amuse the audience at the Globe. He could feel, indeed, the irony

with which fate treats the great men of action. Masterful ambitions lead to catastrophes, and in the political world, where order and subordination are the essentials, even the ideal hero who can be calm in the storm, and hold his own amidst the struggling elements, is not much the better for it personally. Henry V. is still but a man made to bear the blame of all mishap, and "subject to the breath of every fool." He has nothing to show for it, "save ceremony," and cannot sleep so soundly as the vacant-minded slave. So the Spanish minister is said to have told the King: "Your Majesty is but a ceremony," an essential part, indeed, of the framework of the State, but not superior in personal happiness to the ordinary human being.


That, it seems to me, points to the most obvious solution of the supposed contrast between the man and the author. Nobody was more keenly alive to every variety of enjoyment, or more capable of sympathising with the passions and ambitions of all the amazingly vigorous life that was going on around him. He can be poet and lover and sportsman, a boon companion, and watch the great game that is played in the court or in the wars. He can act as they come every part in Jaques's famous speech, always with an eye to the end of the strange, eventful history; take every-

thing as it comes, and yet ask, "What is it worth?" Never forget, he seems to have replied, that life is very short, and man very small, and the pleasure of each stage in it always has drawbacks, and will disappear altogether as the powers decline. And by the time you are fifty it will be well to have a comfortable little place of your own in the quiet country town endeared by youthful memories.

If everything that I have said should be granted, there would be great gaps in our knowledge of Shakespeare. We could only fill them by the help of data no longer ascertainable. We do not know what scrapes he may have got into; only that he must have got out of them: nor how much he cared for his wife and children, nor how he behaved in business transactions, nor whether he was too obsequious to his patrons. If such questions could be answered we might know a great deal more of him. Yet I think also that some very distinct personal qualities are sufficiently implied. Shakespeare's life suggests a problem. We have, on the one hand, a man abnormally sensitive to all manner of emotions, and having an unrivalled power of sympathy with every passion of human nature. On the other hand, though exposed to all the temptations of a most exciting "environment," he accomplishes a prosperous and out-

wardly commonplace career. He could emerge from the grosser element, no doubt, because his powers of intellect and imagination raised him above the level of the sensualist, whose tastes he sometimes condescended to gratify. But he could not be a Puritan, because their stern morality was radically opposed to the æsthetic enjoyment to which he was most sensitive. He cared little for the æstheticism of a different and more sentimental type, which condemns as worldly the great passions and emotions which are the really moving forces of the world. He sympathises far too heartily with human loves and hatreds and political ambitions. But then he cannot, like Marlowe or Chapman, sympathise unequivocally with the heroic when it becomes excessive and over-strained. The power of humour keeps him from the bombastic and the affected, and he sees the facts of life too clearly not to be aware of the vanity of human wishes, the disappointments of successful ambition, and the emptiness of its supposed rewards. He is profoundly conscious of the pettiness of human life and of the irony of fate—of which, indeed, he had plenty of instances before him. This, I fancy, implies personal characteristics which fall in very well, so far as they can be grasped, with what we know of the life. Be a Romeo while you can; love is delightful

when you are young; only, think twice before you buy your dram of poison. As you grow older be a soldier, a hero, or a statesman, or, if you can be nothing better, be a playwright, so long as the inspiration comes with spontaneous and overpowering force. But always remember to keep your passions in check, and do not forget that the prize, even if you win it, may turn to ashes in your mouth. Fate is always playing ugly tricks, punishing the reckless, and exposing illusions. The struggle is fascinating while it lasts because it rouses the energies; but when the energies decay, the position which it has won loses its charm. Literary glory, though one may talk about it in sonnets, is a trifle. Your rivals are many of them very good fellows, and make excellent society; it is both pleasant and prudent to be on good terms with them, and nothing is so contemptible as the rivalry of authors. But, after all, success only means a position among jealous dependants of great men, who themselves are very apt to get into the Tower and even to the scaffold. When youthful passions have grown feeble, and the delight of being applauded by the mob has rather palled upon one, the best thing will be to break one's magical wand and sit down with, we will hope, "good Mistress Hall" for a satisfactory Miranda, at Stratford-upon-Avon. Though we



can no longer write ballads to our mistress's eyebrow, we can heartily appreciate gentle, pure, and obedient womanhood, and may hope that some specimens may be found, while we still enjoy a chat and a convivial meeting with an old theatrical friend. This view of life suggests, I think, a very real person, and does not go beyond what is substantially admitted by literary critics.



## Southey's Letters

I READ somewhere the other day a contemptuous reference to Southey's letters. It gave me a shock, and yet, upon reflection, I had to admit that from a purely literary point of view it had some justification. In spite of this, I can always turn with pleasure to the ten volumes of correspondence. I might justify myself by the often quoted passage in which Thackeray contrasts Southey as the true gentleman with the spurious article called George IV. "Southey's politics," said Thackeray, "are obsolete, and his poetry dead; but his private letters are worth piles of epics, and are sure to last among us as long as kind hearts like to sympathise with goodness and purity and love and upright life." Professor Dowden's charming account of Southey (in the *Men of Letters* Series) is a prolonged commentary upon the same theme. I should be glad if I could set down my own liking for the letters to sheer sympathy with goodness and purity. I am aware, indeed, that it is the fashion to drop all moral prejudices before putting on one's critical robes; but I have a sneaking regard for the qualities mentioned by Thackeray

when they are not smothered under too heavy a burthen of intellectual feebleness. Southey's virtues are not obscured by that defect. His letters are the self-portraiture of a man whose good qualities are seconded by superabundant vivacity. I am afraid, however, that this does not quite sum up the impression which they make. Southey was not exactly the typical saint—the man whose talents serve only to give lustre to the beauty of holiness. The eulogy which I have quoted would be equally applicable to Lamb's favourite Quaker, John Woolman, a touching incarnation of simplicity and good-will to man. Now, Southey was no Quaker, but a man of war from his youth up—a hard hitter and a good hater; and such qualities, though they may be excellent, are not simple applications of the Sermon on the Mount. Thackeray would, of course, have given some touches of this kind if he had been drawing a full-length portrait, and not simply seeking for an antithesis to his pet aversion. Professor Dowden, I think, went a little too far in toning down the qualities which do not exactly fit the ideal candidate for canonisation. I am content for my part to say that Southey reached such moral excellence as is possible for his position. He is good enough (if I may speak as a member of the craft) to serve as the patron saint

of men of letters by profession, though we must humbly confess that he would be a little out of place in a more exalted sanctuary. A man who lives by his pen must renounce some pretensions to lofty morality; he cannot expect to be on a pedestal beside the great philanthropists and prophets and statesmen. He confesses himself to belong to a lower class of humanity; but he may be a good specimen of his class, as a cab-horse may be a good cab-horse though he does not expect to win the Derby. If he pays his bills and is kind to his family, and does not sell his pen to the enemy, he deserves respect in his life, and may at least claim the usual complimentary epitaph. Southey is interesting to me because he represents the high-water-mark in that direction during his own generation. He is the most complete type of the man fitted by nature for this peculiar function, which one must sorrowfully admit not to be the highest.

The problem which presents itself to the professional man of letters might be illustrated by that most pathetic autobiography of Mrs. Oliphant which has, I think, been rather harshly judged. Mrs. Oliphant thought (and, as I believe, with some justice) that, if freed from pecuniary pressure, she could have rivalled some more successful authors, and possibly have written a novel fit to



stand on the same shelf with *Adam Bede*. She resigned her chance of such fame because she wished to send her sons to Eton. It, is of course, clear enough that, if she had sent them to some humbler school, she might have come nearer to combining the two aims, and have kept her family without sacrificing her talents to over-production. But, granting the force of the dilemma, I confess that I honour rather than blame the choice. I take it to be better for a parent to do his (or her) parental duty than to sacrifice the duty to art or the demands of posterity. Perhaps that is because I have a low opinion of the intrinsic value of artistic masterpieces. But I refer to Mrs. Oliphant merely to emphasise Southey's peculiarity. To him there scarcely appeared to be any dilemma at all. He says in an early letter that he has sacrificed prospects of wealth and rank to "one overwhelming propensity"; but that propensity, he adds, "has made me happy and will make me immortal." He gave up his chances of a seat on the woolsack for the certainty of a place beside Milton or Spenser. He never doubted the possibility of combining the professional author with the inspired prophet. Undoubtedly the feat has been performed. Masterpieces have been written by Shakespeare and others, who turned them out in the way of business. But,

in such cases, though the business motive unlocks the fountain, the spring is already full. The mind, that is, is charged with imagery and reflection: with thoughts, as Browning puts it, "self-gathered for an outbreak" and "chafing in the censer." Southey seems to have imagined that preliminary accumulation was scarcely needed. He did not need any apprenticeship before setting up as a fully equipped teacher of mankind. "It is the very nose on the face of my intellect," he says quaintly, "that my mind is useless without its tools." He can never think regularly "unless the pen be in his hand." Then his thoughts flow as fast as the water from "the rock of Horeb." But without the "wand"—the pen, that is, to strike the rock—the rock remains dry. If thinking and uttering are identical, meditation and reflection are superfluous. That partly explains Southey's amazing habits of business-like composition. He divides his time with the absolute punctuality of a city clerk between his various employments: writing *Kehama* before breakfast to earn "immortality," and dividing the rest of the day between reviews, histories, and the exposition of sound moral and political philosophy. His friend Landor, to whom, by his own account, poetical composition meant nights broken by tears and days of absorption,

wondered at Southey's facility, and, we must suppose, contrived to avoid the reflection that the wonder would be diminished when the value of the results was taken into account. People like Dante and Milton supposed that a whole life must be devoted to a great poem; Wordsworth felt at least that it would require an abundant allowance of "wise passiveness." Southey had the pleasant illusion that the only relaxation needed was a change of labour, and that the fertility of the mind could be preserved, not by lying fallow, but by a rotation of crops, poetical, political, historical, to say nothing of the multitudinous varieties of hack-work which filled up the interstices. It is odd, though characteristic, that so devoted a student of literature should never have asked himself, or fully considered, the question, What really goes to the making of a masterpiece?

I find, indeed, that critics of authority speak of Southey's poems with respect, and weigh in their judicial balances the relative merits of *Joan of Arc*, and *Thalaba*, and *Madoc*, and *Roderick*, and the rest, though they do not seem to agree as to which is the best. I venture no opinion. I once had a friend—and a very intelligent friend—who had *Madoc* at his fingers' ends. Scott read it four times with "increasing admiration." Fox read it

aloud at night, and with the surprising result of keeping his hearers awake for an hour beyond the usual time. Perhaps their sleep was afterwards the sounder. Dean Stanley was an ardent admirer—and who am I, to say that I cannot bring my mind even to remember the family relationships of Madoc and Goervyl and Cadwallon, or to take the smallest interest in the conversations of Tezozomoc and Yuhidthiton, or to understand why Erillyab cursed the hour in which she gave birth to Amalahta? The most remarkable eulogy upon Southey that I know is by Cardinal Newman. To show how literary language can be improved, he contrasts one of Milton's craggy choruses in *Samson Agonistes* with Southey's opening verses in *Thalaba*—"How beautiful is night"—and decides that Southey shows to advantage. Southey's verses are, of course, smoother: whether they show a greater mastery of versification is a question in which I fear to contradict so exquisite a judge. Yet Newman would surely have agreed that if Southey's versification in general could be compared to Milton's as fair specimens of the two periods, the obvious moral would be, not the improvement but the possible degradation of poetic dialect. A secret would seem to have been lost, and mere facility of handling to have taken the place of the marvellous instinct which created

Milton's majestic harmonies. Perhaps, indeed, Newman only intended to say what may be more easily accepted. Southey, no doubt, writes like a thoroughly practised craftsman; he has all the technical skill that implies a trained sensibility without high genius, and avoids the occasional blunders, if he cannot approach the felicities, of Milton's splendid audacity.

Apart from such technical matters, Southey's poetry has attracted many readers on the moral side. Carlyle says that he recognised the "piety, the gentle deep affection, the reverence for God and man which reigned in these pieces" (*Thalaba*, *Joan of Arc*, and so forth), "full of soft pity, like the wailings of a mother, and yet with a clang of chivalrous valour finely audible, too." So Professor Dowden tells us that Southey's heroes embody his native stoicism; he had been an enthusiastic reader of Epictetus in early youth, and his great characters are models of fortitude and self-devotion under overpowering difficulties. I do not doubt that this ought to be felt; only it must be confessed that it has to struggle with certain difficulties. Boys (I can answer for one case) used to read *Thalaba* and *The Curse of Kehama*, as they read the *Arabian Nights*, which does not embody stoical morality. The pleasure came from the curious stories of eccentric mytho-



logy which Southey had extracted from his multifarious reading. The first motive of these poems was not the setting forth of moral ideals, but the illustration of ancient mythologies. After the days of childish simplicity all this "machinery" is apt to reveal its comic side. Kehama, as it may now be necessary to mention, is a wonderful Hindoo prince, who has become an "almighty man" by performing certain rites of mysterious efficacy. He uses his power to curse his enemy, Ladurlad, and, with the singular shortsightedness common in fairy stories, tries to prolong his victim's sufferings by endowing him with immortality and invulnerability. The result is that Ladurlad is always turning up in the most impossible times and places, and, being invulnerable, can frustrate all Kehama's tyrannical schemes by such singular feats as choking a supernatural sea-monster after a week of wrestling. It becomes quite impossible, as his eulogist admits, to "drop a tear" over Ladurlad and his amiable daughter. They may be very virtuous, but their position is too grotesque; and when the terrible Kehama appears at the eight gates of Hell all at once, and tackles the excellent god of that district, one foresees too well the coming transformation scene. The lofty stoicism only adds a touch of the comic to this topsy-turvy world of the totally irrational.

Fairyland is a very pleasant region in its way, and so is the philosophical world of ethical ideals, but somehow they do not blend very easily. There are certain poems of Southey's which we can all read with pleasure. The *Old Woman of Berkeley*, for example, and others in which he appears as poet-laureate to the devil—the genuine “Old Nick,” with horns and hoofs, who found his master in St. Antidius and sat for his portrait to the Spanish painter, and enlivened mediæval chronicles with the quaint legends which Southey delighted to unearth. The ballads are better, I think, than the *Ingoldsby Legends*, because they are less vulgar and less elaborately funny. Southey tells us how he first read the legend of the “old woman of Berkeley” in a chronicle chained to the upper shelf of the neglected library in a Spanish convent, having to stand on a chair to reach his treasure, and how he set about his verses “that very evening.” We have the genuine man of letters looking up in playful mood, delighted by the nugget of quaint absurdity which has enlivened his labours, and pouring out his ballad with spontaneous and infectious delight.

This, however, suggests to ordinary criticism that in the “epic” the literary gentleman does not get sufficiently out of sight. After the excellent Joan of Arc has astonished the priests of her day

by versifying a bit of Rousseau, we have to listen to a series of extracts from chronicles, and to consult authorities as to the mediæval methods of warfare, which tend to damp one's ardour, and I humbly confess that my efforts to read later poems have generally been frustrated by the temptation of plunging into the notes in which the epic poet gives his authorities. Southey's reading had made him familiar with much that is now called "Folk-lore," and I turn from an affecting incident in the *Tale of Paraguay* to follow his remarks upon the curious custom of the "cou-vade," or from a tremendous fight of Madoc with a sacred serpent, to read an account of "the wonderful docility of the snake." The reader of an epic poem is clearly not in the right mood when he is accessible to such temptations; and he infers, rightly perhaps, that the writer must have been equally below the imaginative tension necessary for success. In fact, an "epic poem" was already an anachronism; though Southey tells us that all clever young men in his day hoped to produce epic poems. I do not know what they want to produce now—something, perhaps, which will seem as absurd a century hence. Anyhow, we are content to pass Southey's poems with the admission that they are not so unreadable as Glover's *Leonidas*, or Wilkie's *Epigoniad*. The charac-

teristic point is Southey's complacent and indomitable faith in his own performances. There is something sublime in his self-confidence. He commends the judicious critic who had said that *Madoc* was the best English poem since *Paradise Lost*. "This is not exaggerated praise, for unfortunately there is no competition." *Madoc* must, indeed, be compared with the *Odyssey*, not with the *Iliad*, but it is a good poem, and must live. He objects to being called the "sublimest poet of the age," for on that point Wordsworth and Landor are "at least his equals." But this statement is not to be suspected of "mock-modesty," as he sufficiently proves by adding that he "will have done greater things than either," though not because he possesses "greater powers." In fact, there are different classes of excellence. His mind, he admits, is wholly unlike Milton's, whose proper analogue is Wordsworth. For himself, he may be fairly compared with Tasso, Virgil, or Homer. Every generation, he observes elsewhere, will afford some half-dozen admirers of *Kehama*, "and the everlasting column of Dante's fame does not stand upon a wider base." Meanwhile, he points out that contemporary popularity can only be won by compliance with the faults of the time—a consoling doctrine which he shared with Wordsworth and Landor. Unfortunately,

there are other roads to unpopularity besides simple excellence. Southey, however, was able to preserve the pleasant belief that he was one of the few fixed stars of his time, though differing from other stars in glory, and that his light would be recognised through the ages to come.

This failing, if it be rightly called a failing, is clearly an essential characteristic. If a man is to be condemned because he has a calm conviction of his own undeniable merits, no case can be made out for Southey. His self-confidence is written in the very character of his face. He fancies that his friend Bedford may attribute one of his humours to the "cut of his nose." Certainly, it is impossible to look at Southey's portrait without admitting that a man with such a nose was predestined to a dogmatic self-complacency. He was strikingly handsome, and Byron, we know, said that he would almost have written Southey's *Sapphics* to have such a head upon his shoulders; and, though it is easy to guess what reply Byron was really courting, the remark certainly implies that his rival had strikingly good looks. Hazlitt speaks of his "falcon glance," and Carlyle of his sharp, eager, "militant" expression. Another describer speaks of his brilliant eyes, under black brows and snow-white hair, but adds the inevitable "beak." The elder Shandy would have taken him

for an illustration of his famous study upon noses. A man with the beak of a falcon has to go through the world defiant, conscious that he is of a higher than the ordinary strain; ready to pounce upon the barn-door fowl, and sometimes, perhaps, mistaking an eagle for a mere overgrown carrion crow. Marmion had a falcon for his crest, with the motto, "Who checks at me to death is dight!" Southey's might have borne the same motto. When he meets an opponent he foresees the result—the wretch is crushed, and will be remembered by posterity solely as a victim to Southey's righteous indignation. We call the quality vanity when we dislike it, and fail to observe how essential a service it renders to its possessor. Would any great thinker or great poet succeed without it? Does it not show portentous self-confidence when a Bacon or a Descartes proposes to reconstruct philosophy, or when a Dante or a Milton undertakes to give utterance to the profoundest religious thought of his age? We judge by the event; and if the man's opinion of himself turns out to be tolerably correct, we speak of his noble consciousness of genius and his fidelity to his powers. If the poor man has made a mistake, we make merry over his conceit. Wordsworth's estimate of his own merits was confirmed in the main by the next generation, and Southey's became the object of

ridicule. Was not the same moral quality implied in both cases? and why should Southey be blamed for taking his ardent love of literature for a proof of supreme literary genius? Ten people must try if one is to succeed. Great, at any rate, must be the comfort of such a possession. Vanity, like sleep, "wraps a man round like a cloak"; it is the natural armour which fits the man of letters for the struggle of existence. Some authors may be simply "pachydermatous," though that is a quality which scarcely fits the true literary temperament. Southey, highly strung, sensitive, and ardent, was gifted with that falcon nose and that superlative self-esteem to comfort and support him through failure and obloquy, and the protracted struggle to make both ends meet. Nothing less could have kept up his spirits through his hard-fought career. "My natural spirits," he says in 1819, "are buoyant beyond those of any person, man, woman, or child, whom I ever saw or heard of." This "vanity," self-esteem, or whatever we please to call it, is simply one aspect of the indomitable buoyancy which enabled him to do some really admirable work, if it led him into rash attempts to soar beyond his powers.

Undoubtedly such a conviction shows a weakness. A man could hardly take himself so seriously who had any very strong sense of humour. But a

sense of humour is hard to reconcile with some cardinal virtues. The true humourist sees that the world is a tragi-comedy, a Vanity Fair, in which enthusiasm is out of place. Southey, with a sense of humour, would have been alive to his own smallness in the general system of things; he would have perceived that even a Quarterly Reviewer cannot make the great current flow backwards, and that a drudging journalist had no right to drape himself in the robes of a prophet. Hopes of "literary immortality," and a place among the dead with Virgil and Homer and Dante, are apt to strike the humourist as illusions—mere gaseous exhalations of vanity to be dispersed by an injection of chilling mockery. It was happy for Southey that he had hardly more humour than Milton or Wordsworth or Shelley or Miss Brontë. In spite of his defect—or his immunity, shall we say from this morbid propensity?—Southey was certainly no prig. He could enjoy nonsense and was proud of it, though his nonsense, it must be confessed, is poor enough in quality. It is amusing to read his correspondence with Grosvenor Bedford upon his *Doctor*. Bedford feared that Southey's jokes might fall a little flat in print. The success of *Tristram Shandy* would not, he said, justify a second assumption of the cap and bells. Southey replies by a rapturous account



of his precious manuscript: the stores of reading which it is to display—the “satire and speculation,” the mixture of truths which require the cap and bells with others which might besem the bench and the pulpit, and withal a narrative, continuous, and yet varying from grave to gay, “taking as wild and natural a course as one of our mountain streams.” He is so delighted with his performance that he confides his hopes to his readers and tells them that the whole world is to be racked by curiosity as to the authorship. He makes cunning little plots to throw readers upon a false scent; he imagines the “stir and buzz and bustle” at tea-tables and booksellers’ shops, and in Holland House. It cannot be Byron’s or Moore’s, it will be said, because it is too moral; or Wordsworth’s, because an elephant does not cut capers on the slack wire; or Coleridge’s, because it is intelligible throughout; or Hazlitt’s, because it is free from egotism and abuse of Southey and Coleridge. Nobody is capable of such a unique combination unless Southey be suggested; and he is “buried under his own historical quartos.” The worthy author, that is, is chuckling to himself because he is able to interpose this marvellous production between his stupendous labours. The *Doctor* was not all that Southey fancied, and yet one is grateful for the illusions which cheered

him. Certainly, he did not make a rival to *Tristram Shandy*. He had not the humour; nor could even Sterne have accomplished *Tristram Shandy* if he had worked under Southey's conditions. It is easy enough to be odd, but to make mere oddity the vehicle for true humour requires an artistic elaboration which cannot be produced without the leisurely thought which can wait for the felicitous combination. Southey, in attempting the "Shandy" vein, achieves oddity and incoherence without genuine humour; he imitates, in Burke's phrase, the contortions, without the inspiration of the Sibyl. But, in spite of that, the *Doctor* is a very delightful book; a book "for the bedside," which is always entertaining without endangering sleep. Like Burton's *Anatomy*, it is, of course, a commonplace book in disguise. But, besides its collection of "curiosities of literature," it has really charming interludes when Southey is not tempted into too deliberate facetiousness. A great author would not like, I imagine, to rest his fame upon a perfect nursery story, and yet, if "literary immortality" be desirable, the immortal story of the *Three Bears* is more likely to secure that result than *Madoc* or *Roderick*. To add a new legend fit to take place amidst the old legendary stories is surely a remarkable feat. This is the gem of the *Doctor*; but it is one outcome

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of a playful and tender sentiment which, amidst some obvious defects, often shows the real charm of Southey's domestic atmosphere. The frontispiece—a view of Southey's back as he sits in his library—is characteristic. You can see the man in spite of the concealment almost as clearly as if he showed his falcon beak: the neat alert figure, not lolling, but sitting bolt upright before the beautiful rows of well-bound books which he managed to collect in spite of his poverty, and which he still affectionately fondled when the power of reading them had gone. The correlation of organism and environment (Southey would have shuddered at such neologisms!) is perfect. He is as much in his place as a Dryad in an oak; and it is not for those who have haunted the same regions to complain if he is a trifle too "bookish." Southey, I must confess, went a bit too far when he took his walks with a book in his hands. I abhor such a practice. It is as bad as smoking a pipe in church; it savours of profanity to the real lovers of walks, and suggests that Southey really liked even mountains better on paper than in reality. One must, however, forgive something to a thoroughbred monomaniac; and if Southey's talk, as De Quincey reports, ran too much upon literature and too little upon life, it meant no indifference or blindness to actual

events, only an acquired necessity of looking at them through his accustomed spectacles. To read the *Doctor* is to spend an hour with Southey in his library; and, if here and there to be a little overdosed with an author's pedantry, yet to be made aware of his domestic charm. There was a nursery in his house as well as a library; and the *Three Bears* must have been told to the precocious boy whose early death almost broke his father's heart. Daniel Dove, his hero, is not an Uncle Toby, but he sufficiently reflects the generous and chivalrous characteristics of his creator.

The *Doctor*, indeed, shows the limitations of Southey's intellect, which have led critics to condemn him as a mere fossil in politics and his enemies to denounce him as a renegade and a timeserver. Few men were more bitterly abused than the "ultra-servile, sack-guzzling laureate" (to quote one flower of speech). Southey, of course, took this as a compliment. "There is no man," he says in 1816, "whom the Whigs and Anarchists hate more inveterately, because there is none whom they fear so much." That is the secret. They tremble at his logic and his eloquence and writhe under his satire. When Mr. William Smith—a very excellent Unitarian and a conspicuous supporter of Wilberforce and Clarkson—called Southey a renegade, Southey retorted

"by branding him on the forehead with the name of slanderer." "Salve the mark as you will, sir, it is ineffaceable! You must bear it with you to your grave, and the remembrance will outlast your epitaph." The pamphlet in which this occurs was considered by Southey and his friends as a triumphant and dignified vindication of his fame; and ends by a "scathing" passage in which Southey sees by anticipation his own life in a biographical dictionary, and "a certain Mr. William Smith" just dragged in at the tail of the article as the retailer of a preposterous calumny. Both of them have, in fact, obtained admission to such a work; but the allusion to their conflict does not quite confirm Southey's prophetic view. The characteristic thing is the way in which Southey unconsciously evades the point. The occasion of the controversy was the republication, by an enemy, of *Wat Tyler*, a performance of the early days in which he had sympathised with the French Revolution. Southey maintains—what no one will now dispute—that a man of over forty may have honestly changed opinions held at twenty. What he fails to see is that a convert should be charitably disposed to the unconverted. A Protestant may become a Catholic without reproach, but he is hardly the proper person to propose that all Protestants should be sent to the

stake. That gave the real edge to Smith's indignation. Radicals were reviving the doctrines of Wat Tyler; they were met by the suspension of the "Habeas Corpus," the "Six Acts," and all the old machinery of suppression. The loudest advocate for applying the scourge was precisely the author of *Wat Tyler*. His letters are full of the wrath roused by Cobbett and "orator Hunt" and the Radical press. "I would have the Anarchists under weigh for Botany Bay or in prison within a month after the meeting of Parliament," he says; and in the *Quarterly Review* he did his utmost to stimulate the fears of the Tory rulers. He urged the amiable Wilberforce to take the side of severity. In his own opinion he is quite consistent, because the persons who now advocate his old principles are diabolical miscreants, seeking to ruin society and initiating the most dangerous conspiracies. When he was a revolutionist, revolutionists were all good men. Things have altered now. The alteration was not so obvious to Mr. William Smith. He and his friends failed to see that they were scoundrels who ought not to be allowed even to open their mouths. On such matters, however, Southey knew himself to be infallible. He was just as certain that he could blast the fame of Byron as that he could indelibly brand the forehead of Mr. William Smith. Byron

and his crew were the "Satanic School"—as he took occasion to point out incidentally, by way of preface to his *Vision of Judgment*. Few people, probably, read Southey's *Vision*, unless in illustration of Byron's most cutting satire; but it is worth a glance in illustration of Southey's own character. Byron, in certain collateral attacks on Southey, no doubt showed his own meaner side; but it is curious to note that his *Vision* has an amazing superiority not only in wit—which goes without saying—but in reverence. Southey gives one of the quaintest of all illustrations of the occasional transition of intense respectability into something very like blasphemy. A devout Christian might be expected to reflect that on the Day of Judgment the political squabbles of the day would lose some of their importance. Southey might even have taken a hint from Swift's famous vision. "Jove's" startling declaration, "I damn such fools!" is not, I suppose, exactly orthodox, and it is certainly misanthropical. But at least it implies that the Deity should not be made a Tory partisan, and that Byron's view that on that day George III. would appear as a stupid, obstinate, well-meaning human being is less shocking than Southey's calm assumption that the old King is still to wear his crown in heaven, and Wilkes and "Junius" be sent straight to hell. A loyal

dedication to George IV., as the providentially appointed inheritor of the merits of his race, adds a specially grotesque touch when we remember that just at this moment that monarch's domestic life was becoming public property. Such blunders are common enough. It is a very good thing to be always on the side of virtue; but it may sometimes lead to the error that you think you have a kind of patent for uttering moral sentiment.

Southey had not the philosopher's elevation nor the poet's insight to see things in their true proportions. To judge him by such standards is simply inappropriate. When Hazlitt reproached him as a turncoat, he had a very fair retort. Hazlitt and he had both taken the French Revolution to be the dawn of liberty. Hazlitt was now worshipping Napoleon, the military despot and the oppressor of Spain and Germany, and still bragging of his "consistency." As Southey put it, "You are still looking for the sun in the east when he has got round to the west. It is I who am still faithful to my aspirations, but have been wise enough to learn by experience that I was mistaken in my facts." To ask which was right would be not only superfluous but irrelevant. Southey's revolutionary sentiment belonged to his schoolboy days. He was still at Westminster when the Bastille was taken, and at Oxford during the early



part of the war. He had found out that "pantisocracy" was an illusion by the time he was of age, and was already reconciled enough to be looking forward to an ordinary professional career. Nobody could blame a man seriously for altering the doctrines which had attracted him at college. But Southey did not really change his opinions; he only changed what he had erroneously supposed to be his opinions. The change of his early teacher, Coleridge, involved an intellectual elaboration: the abandonment of the philosophy which had satisfied his early youth, and the steeping of his mind in the mystical doctrines discovered in Germany. Wordsworth, when he rejected the revolutionary teachers, went through a prolonged spiritual crisis, and had to struggle long and grievously before he could get his feet upon a satisfactory rock. When Southey changed, it did not even occur to him that he was changing at all. He did not alter his philosophical creed, because he had no philosophical creed to alter. He got on very well, as most of us do, without one. He does not know much about metaphysics, as he admits, at twenty-one, but he has quite enough to confute Godwin. He takes up the first handy argument that is lying about. It will do to rap his antagonist's knuckles, and he does not inquire to what else it may commit him. His son tells

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us how he started as a Stoic, and then became a Unitarian, and finally a devoted Anglican, by imperceptible degrees. At each stage, moreover, he was equally confident that he had possession of the whole truth, and that his complete satisfaction with the creed of the moment should be a conclusive proof of its validity to everybody else. He was content with any general principle which would serve for a war-cry. He was not a man, as he says, for half-measures. He was too vehement by nature not to like good round sweeping assertions, but he looked at the concrete embodiment of principles, not at the abstract justification. In his generous and impetuous youth he worshipped Rousseau, and was carried off his feet by the brilliant Coleridge. He did not ask how the cosmopolitan philanthropy was to be combined with the patriotic zeal which was equally ingrained in the youthful Briton. They simply lay side by side in his mind. When the Revolution led to the Terror in France, and to suppression of free speech in England, he inferred that Robespierre on one side and Pitt on the other were very bad men, and did not bother about more general causes. He indulged for the time in a little misanthropy in the humour of Swift; professed to hate mankind in a mass, though he loved individuals; and, in short, held that every-

body, except Southey, had gone mad. The "misanthropy" was shallow enough, and did not for a moment diminish his buoyancy, his interest in life and in books, or his delight in his friends and family. It only meant that, for the time, there was no party to which he could swear unreserved allegiance, and for one who is by nature a partisan that is an intolerable position. His dislike of "that wretched Pitt," that "coxcomby, insolent, empty-headed, long-winded braggadocio" (phrases used on occasion of Pitt's death, but representing his permanent view), gradually developed into hatred, not of the tyrant but of the incompetent War Minister. The patriotism becomes more permanent than the republicanism. When the Peninsular War began he had at last a cause to swear by. Jeffrey had criticised *Thalaba* and tried to crush Wordsworth ("as well try to crush Skiddaw," said Southey), and now Jeffrey and his clique were preaching that England must be beaten by Napoleon. This cowardice (so they thought it) roused Southey as it roused Scott. *The Quarterly Review*, afterwards Southey's mainstay, was started to give expression to the new sentiment. Even Wordsworth was roused to write a political pamphlet. The war was no longer a crusade against Jacobinism, but a war in defence of oppressed nations. To Southey the appeal

came with especial force, because he had lived in Portugal and was thoroughly versed in Spanish and Portuguese literature. He looked forward, as he declared, not merely to a resurrection of the Spanish people, but to the creation of a federal republic. His old and his new principles pointed in the same direction. He dropped his "misanthropy" now that he had at last a plain cause to be supported by tooth and nail. His indomitable buoyancy made him superlatively confident, and, having backed the winning side, he was ever afterwards convinced that he was an infallible prophet. He could criticise Moore or Wellington by the light of nature; and, if things went wrong for a time, it was always from neglect of the advice which he would have given. The most valuable result for us of Southey's enthusiasm was the famous *Life of Nelson*. Nothing could be more characteristic. Southey's ignorance of nautical matters was absolute. He was, as he says, a "thorough landlubber," who just knew the binnacle from the mainmast, and had to walk among sea terms as "a cat does in a china-pantry." He, of course, had not read Captain Mahan. The motives of Nelson's strategy are left in judicious obscurity, and we have to take it on faith that he was right on any given occasion in hauling his wind or brailing up his mainsail. Apocryphal

stories are accepted without an attempt at criticism. But the book, in spite of an excessive "jingoism" and very unworthy abuse of the French, is a classic, because no biographer was ever more in sympathy with his hero, or wrote more simply and directly. Nelson's three great commandments—obey orders, honour the King, and hate the French as you hate the devil—apply to warfare the principles which Southey applied to literature. Absolute simple-minded devotion to the immediate purpose in hand is characteristic of both. Nelson in sight of a French fleet and Southey opposed to a Radical orator strike home with the same inexorable and uncompromising zeal. Even Nelson's vanity and thirst for "glory" recall Southey's literary aspirations, and, if Southey could not be a real naval critic, he could give to perfection the essential charm of the historic character.

Southey's patriotic enthusiasm imperceptibly carried him into the Tory camp. The author of *Wat Tyler* would have been shocked by the Quarterly Reviewer. Yet the change should surely be intelligible now that we can adopt the historical point of view. To abuse Southey as a renegade was quite natural so long as the old party lines were taken to mark the distinction between right and wrong. But that theory seems

to be a little obsolete. I have lived long enough to see a change on a larger scale which may help to account for Southey's supposed tergiversation. We are told by Liberals that they adhere unflinchingly to the immortal principles of their creed. Still, one who was a Liberal fifty years ago must admit that those principles have come to support theories, especially about Government interference, which they were once used to demolish. Southey's conversion was simply a crude anticipation of the same change. It is curious to read Macaulay's review of Southey's *Colloquies*. Macaulay, as usual, talks a great deal of very sound common-sense, and makes mincemeat of some of Southey's amazing expositions of political economy. Macaulay is a prophet in the school of Adam Smith. He rejoices in a Pisgah-sight of the blessed period when cultivation will be carried to the top of Helvellyn, and there will be no travelling but by steam. The one secret for reaching the land of promise is that rulers should leave men to manage their own affairs, and abandon the folly of "paternal government." Southey, indeed, talked a great deal of downright nonsense. He admits his ignorance of political economy, which he regards as a conclusive proof that political economy was not worth knowing. He falls into fallacies too absurd for argument. The

distress which followed the peace was simply due to the loss of a customer (that is, the Government) to the amount of fifty millions a year; and the remedy was not retrenchment but maintenance of the war expenditure, even (as he suggests) by building enormous "pyramids" to Nelson and Wellington. He talked, says Macaulay, as if the taxes dropped out of heaven like the "quails and manna sent to the Israelites." That such fallacies could be seriously propounded is some excuse for the arrogance of the contemporary economists. They represent simply the illogical way in which Southey clutched at extravagant theories as the readiest mode of contradicting their opposites. If, however, the *Colloquies* abound in such absurdities, a reader of to-day will be still more struck by the anticipation of modern tendencies. Southey can hardly mention Malthus without foaming at the mouth. That was because "Malthus" meant for him the doctrine that vice and disease were necessary checks to population; and that the only way to suppress poverty was to leave the poor man to starve. He denounced the "manufacturing system" even in his early writings, as the great source of evil, because it meant the breaking up of the old social bonds, the growth of a vast "proletariat," and the conditions under which the rich become

richer and the poor poorer, or, as he puts it, the capitalists, like pike in a fish-pond, eat up the smaller fish. He attacks Pitt (absurdly enough) as responsible for the cruelties inflicted upon children in factories, and Lord Shaftesbury, when he took up the factory legislation, wrote to Southey, as a disciple to one of his chief teachers. Macaulay supposes that Southey thinks well of Owen simply because Owen was "more unreasonably and hopelessly in the wrong than any speculator of our time." Southey's sympathy meant really (as many of his letters show) that he held that Owen, in spite of some shocking opinions and chimerical hopes, was at least attacking the great social evil—the spreading cancer of pauperism. Now that we have "all become Socialists" we can at least admit that Southey saw something which was hidden from Macaulay. Southey, of course, rushed to extremes. He is as vehement and one-sided as Carlyle, whose *French Revolution* he admired and whose *Chartism* would have been quite to his taste. He held (as many observers held then) that the country was oscillating between a servile war and a military despotism. His remedy was that Government should do its duty and suppress discontent by improving the condition of the poor. He rivalled the most bigoted Tories of the day in supporting despotic measures;



but he also protested most vehemently against the neglect of corresponding duties. He demanded a national system of education as vigorously as he supported the attacks upon the Press. His theories had another side which struck Macaulay as specially absurd. He held with Burke that "religion is the basis of civil society." Southey, in his vehement way, takes for granted as a self-evident "postulate" that religion means the Anglican religion, and comes painfully near to proving that no others should be tolerated. He admits, indeed, that the Church requires reforms. The *Life of Wesley*, in other ways a very charming and characteristic book, is really designed in support of one of his favourite schemes—the enlistment of the Methodists as "Cossacks" or irregular troops auxiliary to the Church. His desire to found Protestant sisterhoods to take up some of the old functions of monastic institutions represents an earlier phase of the movement which has since transformed the Church of England. Southey's belief that the Golden Age was somehow due to the Reformation, and that the Reformation was also the cause of pauperism and half the social evils of the day, is an odd instance of the way in which he was governed by the prejudices of his position. He hated popery as heartily as he hated Malthus, and yet a generation later he

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would probably have followed Cardinal Manning, who had some similar qualities of character. The odd collection of vehement and uncompromising prejudices which Southey took for principles meant a hasty assimilation of doctrines which, for good or evil, were to gain strength in the next generation. When we can look at him simply as a historical phenomenon, we can see how he represents a rising force even more than a mere obstruction. To Whigs of the Macaulay stamp he seemed to be simply a "reactionary" partisan and a servile follower of Sidmouth or Eldon. It is easy now to see that they would have done better to take a hint from the enemy. He recognised social evils, and proposed quack remedies. They met him by denying that any remedy was wanted. That may sufficiently explain why even in Southey's rash dogmatism there is something less antiquated than in Macaulay's optimistic confidence in the policy of doing nothing.

Some of his old prejudice hangs about Southey still, and obscures some merits of the letters. We are repelled by some of his outrageous utterances instead of simply taking them as indications of character. Instead of being amused, we are tempted to the absurdity of contradicting or even arguing. Then his directness and simplicity produce one bad result. Southey constantly insisted

upon the doctrine, consoling for some authors, that the secret of good writing is to be concise, clear, and pointed, and not to think about your style at all. "Style" must come unconsciously. You must aim at the mark without thinking about your attitude. The method is excellent when you are writing a plain statement of fact or argument, and is so far applicable in letter-writing that self-consciousness or deliberate attempts at literary elegance is the worst of all faults. Yet really first-rate letters should imply a certain detachment. The writer should be able to play a little with his subject: to tell a bit of news so as to give the picturesque aspects; to insinuate a humorous or melancholy reflection without falling into sermonising; and, in short, to put into a few lines the effect of a whole evening of spontaneous and discursive chat. Southey, having to squeeze in a letter between an epic and a quarterly review, is too eager and impetuous. He goes to the point at once like a good man of business, and cannot give the effect of leisurely and amused reflection. The reader has to supply a good deal from independent knowledge, or to gather it from the general result of the correspondence. Then we gradually become aware of those admirable moral qualities of which Thackeray speaks. He takes up one burthen after another as all in the day's

work so simply that we may fail to notice the energy implied in his forty years of unremitting labour. It is quite natural, when one comes to think of it, that his brain should have given way at last: but at any given moment he seems to be working as smoothly and unconsciously as a well-oiled steam-engine. There are no creaks and groans and whinings, and one can forget that there was any strain. So he makes few protestations; but the old friendships go on from schoolboy days to the end without a cloud. Though irritable and sensitive, he seems never to have had one of those personal quarrels which, it is to be feared, give a zest to many literary biographies, and his self-restraint leads us to ignore the temptations overcome. The friendship with Coleridge alone seems to have cooled very decidedly; but it must be admitted that it was hard for the most methodical of authors to preserve his affection for the amiable poet and philosopher, who could be systematic in nothing but in neglecting his duties and leaving them to be discharged by his brother-in-law. We smile at Southey's vanity, and forget to notice his freedom from self-conscious egotism which provokes jealousy of rivals. Nobody could be more generous than Southey in appreciating eminent contemporaries, or giving a helping hand to young men of promise. He is, it is true, rather

apt to discover "satanic" propensities in his antagonists; but he was at least a perfectly straightforward and sincere enemy. Of all the charges made by his enemies, the most absurd was that of servility. He always says what he thinks, and, though he had never a year's income in advance, never condescended to unworthy flattery of patrons or the public. If he estimates his work too highly, he takes it as a mere matter of course that he should be independent and plain-spoken. The letters after the death of the son who was to have inherited his genius are almost the only ones in which Southey allows himself to utter the strong domestic affections in which we see, on reflection, that he found his real happiness. Even in the midst of this grief he is, perhaps, a little over-anxious to insist upon his power of preserving a stoical calm; but for once he cannot conceal the emotions which he generally keeps in the background. Poor Mrs. Southey, one suspects, had a rather bad time of it with the anxieties which he met so gallantly. She must have grudged the purchase of that *Acta Sanctorum* over which he rejoices without a thought of weekly bills. When, however, one tries to form a picture of Southey's life and to supply the side which he leaves in obscurity, one begins to hope that even a journalist may save his soul. That the letters do not

give up that secret at the first glance is perhaps the reason why they are not more generally valued; but to those who have been immersed in the same element, it should not be difficult to supply the gaps. He gets rather hard measure. Some modern readers seem to like it as much precisely the qualities which they would despise in the man. Southey, as a gentleman to the core, was incapable of the wayward egotism and inner personality which Hazlitt cherished and even turned to account in his works. Posterity is too apt to prefer the man who will reveal his feelings, even when they are in themselves ignoble; and Southey's "stoicism," honourable as it was, has perhaps alienated rather than attracted sympathy.

## New Lights on Milton<sup>1</sup>

POLITICAL economists in former days puzzled themselves over the attempt to find a constant standard of value. Literary critics may congratulate themselves upon possessing such a standard for their own purposes in Milton's poetry. Many reputations have risen and set, and sometimes risen again, while he has been shining as a fixed star. Dryden recognised his genius in the days of Charles II.; Addison paid him homage on behalf of the wits of Anne's reign; Johnson's prejudices against the republican only emphasise his testimony to the enduring fame of the epic poet; and Wordsworth, while renouncing the style sanctioned by Milton's authority, was among the

- <sup>1</sup>1. *Milton*. By Walter Raleigh. London: Edward Arnold, 1900.
2. *Poetical Works of John Milton*. Edited after the original texts by the Rev. H. C. Beeching. Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1900.
3. *Milton's Prosody*. By Robert Bridges. Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1893.
4. *Milton's Poems*. Edited by A. Wilson Verity in "Pitt Press Series." Cambridge University Press, 1897, etc.
5. *Facsimile of the Manuscript of Milton's Minor Poems preserved in the Library of Trinity College, Cambridge*. Cambridge University Press, 1899.

most reverential worshippers of Milton himself. The unsurpassed industry of Professor Masson is a sufficient indication of Milton's power in later years; and we have before us ample proofs of the loving zeal with which he is still studied. Mr. Bridges has examined his prosody; Mr. Beeching has edited the poetry, reproducing for the first time the spelling and punctuation of the early poems; a facsimile of the invaluable manuscripts in the library of Trinity has been published under the superintendence of Dr. Aldis Wright; and the University Press of Cambridge has issued a series of poetical works elaborately annotated by Mr. A. W. Verity. The student who desires to investigate the minutest secrets of Milton's art will be at no loss for an appropriate critical apparatus. Such services perhaps deserve more gratitude than they will get. Mr. Beeching has made himself so well known as an appreciative critic that we may doubt at first sight whether his talents are employed to the best account in regulating commas and deciding in which cases "wee" is a misprint and in which a deliberate correction of "we." Still, everything helps. The microscope has been so useful in natural science that we are encouraged to apply it to literature; and the genuine lover of a great poet shrinks from no labour which can bring out a particle of new meaning.



Milton has had obvious attractions for commentators ever since Bentley's days. His peculiarities of spelling and grammar, his obligations to previous literature, his geographical, astronomical, and theological theories all call for elucidation. Those who have come under his spell will be grateful for help in innumerable directions. The mass of subsidiary information supposed to be necessary may to others suggest a certain misgiving. The series of poems excellently edited by Mr. Verity is intended for educational purposes, and the notes answer exhaustively all the questions which may reasonably occur to students. They remind us, however, that ingenuous youth in these days has an eye to the ubiquitous examiner. He reads the invocation to Sabrina, and is told—most undeniably—that it is “golden.” He takes that for granted. The examiner will not ask him for rhetoric, but inquire, Who was the “Carpathian wizard?” What is the *locus classicus* describing the wizard's wiles? Who had previously told the story of Sabrina? The attendant spirit, he will notice, has learned from “Melibœus” the right mode of invoking her; and Professor Masson thinks that this is a “somewhat sarcastic allusion” to Geoffrey of Monmouth (the “sarcasm,” it must be admitted, is carefully hidden). This suggests the desirability of reading Geoffrey's narrative,

and then of remarking how it was modified by Milton in his history of England. Some young gentleman will wish by this time that Sabrina had been left at the bottom of the Severn. It is presumed that one who understands the allusions will be so far better qualified for enjoying the melody. We could wish to be more sure that he will begin by his enjoyment, and not regard the poem as a mass of pegs on which to hang questions. We are told that English youths ought to study English literature. That is undeniable; but there is a way of compelling them to study it which will make them loathe the subject for the rest of their days. "Does anybody," we once heard a young gentleman ask, after cramming *Hamlet* for such purposes, "does anybody ever read Shakespeare for pleasure?"

This, of course, is not intended to decry such books as Mr. Verity's. I only point out that there is a wrong as well as a right way of using them; and it is not for him, but for teachers, to do their best to discourage the wrong method. They cannot do better than by accepting the method of Professor Raleigh. Professor Raleigh admits that the task of literary criticism is at best one of "disheartening difficulty." To appreciate a great author, he says, requires knowledge and industry, and in the end "it is the critic, and not

the author, who is judged by it." That is clearly true if "appreciation" means a reasoned estimate of the author's qualities. "An appreciation of Milton," said Pattison, "is the last reward of consummated scholarship"; and yet it is probable that the unlearned John Bright "appreciated" Milton in another sense as well as Pattison, and incomparably better than Bentley. The first and essential step is the spontaneous love of the poet; where that exists, learning and critical knowledge may reveal new beauties and deepen the sense of the old; to explain and justify the fully-developed sentiment requires the knowledge and industry of which Professor Raleigh speaks, as well as his conspicuous impartiality and power of analysis. Writers of all schools have felt Milton's power. What has changed has been, not their admiration, but the grounds upon which they proposed to justify it. Successive critics have tried to prove, with more or less plausibility, that Milton's poetry conformed to the canons which they accepted as orthodox. The reasons often strike us as obsolete—even when we accept their conclusions. We judge not only the critic, but the code of criticism. Professor Raleigh can hardly say anything absolutely new in the way of eulogy upon Milton, but he can give tenable grounds for the faith that is in him. He can extricate the real

causes of his predecessors' enthusiasm from the sham reasons intended to justify it. Moreover, though he has enlightened his judgment by studying previous critics, he is a thoroughly independent thinker, and accepts no dictum without careful scrutiny. Perhaps here and there he takes the slightly supercilious tone of the æsthetic expert anxious to rebuff the Philistine. But he can flout the "New Criticism"—whatever that may be—and, unlike most Miltonians, he speaks with emphatic respect of Johnson's opinions. Professor Raleigh, that is, values the masculine common-sense which to many more squeamish critics has appeared to be the embodiment of brutal iconoclasm. The critic who can be subtle and delicate without losing touch of Johnsonian common-sense would represent the ideal eclecticism. Professor Raleigh approximates at least to that desirable combination, and he also has the merits of an admirable style, and most commendable conciseness of exposition.

Professor Raleigh begins by speaking of Milton himself. The singular simplicity and dignity of Milton's character could never have been quite missed by any reader. His superb egoism is unrivalled in literature; and Pattison gives the obvious answer to his own rather superfluous question, why such egoism is not offensive. It is

because Milton's egoism is identical with consciousness of a lofty vocation and a great responsibility. From his earliest years his powers were dedicated to a great cause, and his life was governed by the desire to be worthy of his calling. A smaller man, indeed, who claimed such a position, might strike us as presumptuous, perhaps as simply ridiculous. As Professor Raleigh puts it, Milton virtually anticipated Dryden's saying: "This man cuts us all out and the Ancients too." Milton had announced his intention of cutting them out in one of his first pamphlets, and requested his readers to let him "go on trust" with them for a few years. "His most enthusiastic eulogists are compelled merely to echo the remarks of his earliest and greatest critic, himself." They can only say, that is, that the pledge was not disproportionate to his power, and that he redeemed it amply. Though Milton's mood changed under hard experiences, the essential Milton remains identical from boyhood to age, and to exhibit the man fully is also to characterise his work. The old critics assume that epic poetry is to be judged by certain rules equally applicable to the *Paradise Lost* and the *Iliad*, and make no more reference to Milton's personality than to Homer's. Biography had not formed an alliance with criticism. Though Johnson's admirable


*Lives* marked the growing importance of biographical data, he still keeps the two subjects apart. A poem must, of course, stand upon its own basis. If we knew as little of Milton as we know of Shakespeare, we might find the same pleasure in *Paradise Lost*; and the *Comus* would be equally exquisite if it were anonymous. Yet even in *Comus*, that excellent elder brother, who has unkindly been called a prig, speaks more clearly when his voice becomes that of a young poet taking up his function as the laureate of virtue.

In any case, biography enables us to divine better the secret of the charm already felt. Johnson, as even Professor Raleigh has to admit, was a little hard upon *Lycidas*. "In this poem, there is no nature, for there is no truth. . . . Nothing can less display knowledge, or less exercise invention, than to tell how a shepherd has lost his companion, and must now feed his flock alone, without any judge of his skill in piping; and how one god asks another god what has become of Lycidas, and how neither god can tell. He who thus grieves will excite no sympathy; he who thus praises will confer no honour." Perhaps a young reader would really learn more from such remarks than from the critic who simply shrieks at them. They are so undeniable in a sense that

he may be driven to justify his pleasure by detecting their inconclusiveness. We cannot quite agree with Professor Raleigh's view that the musical lamentation may, in spite of Johnson, be considered "as the effusion of real passion." *Lycidas* does not convince us that Milton's breakfast was spoilt when he heard that King was drowned. It is more to the purpose that Milton was "thinking as much of himself as of his dead companion." *Lycidas* was Edward King, but he also personified the Cambridge culture struggling against the dry scholastic stupidity of the college authorities. The poetry in this sense represents a genuine emotion. Milton is still steeping his mind in literary studies, reading alternately classical tragedy and the comedy of learned Jonson and "sweetest Shakespeare," losing himself in old romances, calling up

him that left half-told  
The story of Cambuscan bold,

out-watching the Bear with thrice-great Hermes;  
and holding that our "sage and serious Spenser  
. . . is a better teacher than Scotus or Aquinas."  
The college dons, certainly Mr. William Chappell,  
represented spiritual slavery equally in literature  
and theology. They embodied the obscurantism  
against which he felt himself to be already set



apart as a champion of liberty. St. Peter therefore introduces himself quite naturally in company with Father Camus and the "herald of the sea." Laud is the common enemy of both; and Milton is already preparing himself, as he puts it, to "blow a dolorous and jarring blast" at the divine command. *Lycidas* becomes intelligible as Milton's utterance when "looking to his equipment" (as Professor Raleigh says) "if perchance he may live to do that in poetry and politics which King had died leaving unaccomplished." In his mind, the cause of Puritanism is identical with the cause of liberal culture in general. Mr. Verity makes the remark, natural to a Cambridge man, that it might have been better had Milton been sent to the great Puritan college, Emmanuel. Its Puritanism, he thinks, would have made Cambridge life more congenial. At Emmanuel, I may add, he would have been brought into relations with the remarkable set of men known afterwards as the Cambridge Platonists. Whichcote was nearly his contemporary, and Cudworth, Culverwell, and John Smith a little his juniors. With them, perhaps, he might have "unsphered the spirit of Plato" to better purpose; and found out that there was a more philosophical method of escaping from the ecclesiastical tyranny of Laud than the acceptance of the harshest Puri-



tanic dogmatism. Milton, however, was as little as possible of a philosophic reasoner; and for the present his vocation meant an uncompromising hostility to the prelates by whom he was "church-outed," and unconditional adherence to their most determined opponents.

This suggests the problem discussed by previous critics—the diversion of Milton's energies from poetry to politics. Pattison gave the uncompromising view of the pure scholar. Milton's pamphlets, he says, now serve only as "a record of the prostitution of genius to political party. They never did any good to the cause." The man who was meditating the erection of an enduring monument was unfortunately distracted into "the most ephemeral of all hackwork." He was writing, in his own phrase, "to catch the worthless approbation of an inconstant, irrational, and image-doting rabble." This sweeping condemnation is pleasantly characteristic of the critic; and, moreover, expresses what most readers feel. If we were able to exchange all the prose pamphlets for another *Comus* or a *Christmas Hymn*, the modern world would certainly be the gainer. Professor Raleigh answers the complaint as Dr. Garnett has done. No "dainty shy poet-scholar," he urges, could have given us anything half as good as *Paradise Lost*. Milton's purpose even in

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poetry was essentially patriotic. He would not, he said, make "verbal curiosity" his end, but would be "an interpreter of the best and sagest things among his own citizens throughout this island in the mother dialect." To keep Milton out of politics, that is, we should have had to emasculate him; and the emasculation would certainly have been fatal to the great poems. The modern "stylist" is generally an "interesting invalid," with a voice too weak to be heard in the market-place. We may quite agree that we would not exchange Milton for a dozen invalids, interesting or otherwise. But is this really the dilemma? Must we choose between the "invalid" and the savage pamphleteer? Was Milton, because a patriot, bound to be scurrilous? It is easy to recall the fierceness of the time: we may possibly admit with Professor Raleigh that the use of Latin is an apology for abuse, and that the English tracts, equally abusive, were written for people accustomed to controversy in Latin. But the argument from the "standard of the time," and the proof that at any given period that standard was exceptionally low, has become a trifle commonplace. Milton's abusiveness scandalised even his contemporaries, and their reproofs extorted from him a sufficiently lame apology. Some people could carry on controversies decently even in those days;

and we might have hoped that a man distinguished above all men for lofty self-respect would have set a good example instead of sanctioning a bad practice. Milton might have taken a lesson from Hooker, who wrote in the spirit of his famous saying: "Your next argument consists of railing and of reasons; to your railing I say nothing; to your reasons I say what follows." Milton never perceives the immense advantage which railing gives to the man who can reply by ignoring it. Therefore he allows a controversy about the rights of Englishmen to degenerate into a squabble about Morus's behaviour to a cookmaid. He is, as Pattison says, like a blind Ajax castigating sheep instead of the Achæans. It is quite true that we still see the Ajax, though his blows might be better directed. Milton invariably convinces us of his absolute fidelity to his lofty vocation, and his noblest utterances of scorn for base motives are wrung from him by his passionate indignation. Still his irascibility perverts his reasoning, though it does not degrade his character.

In Milton the personal element is always present. It disfigures his first controversy upon Church government. He writes upon divorce because he has quarrelled with his wife; and upon the freedom of the press because his writings on divorce are censured. He cannot abstract his

cause from himself. Since he represents virtue, his adversaries must be embodiments of vice. He not only assumes that his enemies are in the wrong, but he often seems to expect that they will grant so obvious an assumption. He complains, for example, that the "table of communion" is fortified "with bulwark and barricado to keep off the profane touch of the laics whilst the obscene and surfeited priest scruples not to paw and mammock the sacramental bread as familiarly as his tavern biscuit." Why must the priest be "obscene and surfeited"? Simply because he is a priest. That may be true; but the priest can hardly be expected to admit the fact. Controversy which starts from such assumptions must degenerate into personal abuse. The divorce pamphlets give the other side of the method. Milton, arguing from his own case, thinks only of the hardship upon the good man linked to an unworthy partner. He complains quaintly in one passage that on account of his chastity he has not had that practical experience of transitory connections which often enables a loose liver to make a happy choice in marriage. The good man ought to have the same opportunity for making experiments, and it does not occur to him that the practice might be demoralising.

This example illustrates what, for want of a

better name, must be called Milton's method of reasoning. He generalises from a single case, and that case his own. "Logical Milton always was," says Professor Raleigh; "he learnt little or nothing from the political events of his time." The "logic" which rejects experience has a strong resemblance to the simpler process of dispensing with logic. Milton, no doubt, was, as Professor Raleigh calls him, "an idealist, pure and simple," and expected to realise the dream of setting up in England a republic on the old classical model. He may be so far compared to theorists of the Rousseau type, who went upon *a priori* principles and were equally scornful of appeals to experience. But the "rights of man" doctrine admitted at least of being set forth as a coherent system of reasoning. Its first principles might be erroneous, but they led by logical process to its conclusion. Milton does not reason to his conclusions; he simply jumps at them. He feels intensely, and judges by his instincts. He does not formulate theories clearly enough to make them consistent or to distinguish between the accidental and the universal element. The most serious disenchantment awaited him in his political doctrine. His strongest political passion was a really noble love of liberty; and by liberty he understood at once the removal of all obstacles to the full moral and

intellectual development of a Milton, and the voluntary subordination of the nation to its Miltons and Cromwells. The time came when the two ideals became inconsistent. Set the nation free, and it would restore Charles II. Milton had accordingly to propose, in the name of liberty, that it should be permanently ruled by an irresponsible oligarchy. He was, of course, untouched by democratic ideas of modern growth; but it would be hard, even on his own terms, to construct any coherent theory out of his instinctive aversions and enthusiasms.

The *Areopagitica* survives alone among Milton's prose works; partly because he is endeavouring to conciliate instead of to browbeat, and can therefore keep his temper, and partly because Milton's own case happened to be the typical case. His arguments have become commonplace, but they are still to the point. Professor Raleigh denies the assertion that the other pamphlets are neglected because their subjects are obsolete. The proposal for freedom of divorce, as he remarks, is so far from obsolete that it is only too prominent at the present day. Milton's argument, however, is obsolete enough. As Bagehot remarks, he is frankly and honestly anxious not for the rights of women, but for the rights of the man. He may be dealing with modern questions, but from a

point of view so dependent upon his own prejudices and the accidents of the day that it has ceased to appeal to us. We may go further. "Neither in politics, theology, nor social ethics," says Lowell, "did Milton leave any distinguishable trace upon the thought of his time or in the history of opinion." His speculations on such topics are forgotten, because they were never really effectual. The theories of Hobbes may be as obsolete in some senses as Milton's; but no one could write the history of political thought without acknowledging their remarkable influence. Even Harrington—insignificant as his actual value has become—probably made a greater mark than Milton upon the speculations of the day. Political theories have an unpleasant way of falling into oblivion; but some of them have at least counted as affecting contemporary thinkers; and it is difficult to say that even that is true of Milton's performances.

When, therefore, Professor Raleigh says that Milton's prose works "raise every question they touch," even if they do not "advance it," we must make a reservation. He approaches his problems from a lofty point of view, and desires that politics should be the incarnation of morality. The tone is as rare in political writings as it is admirable. No one can wish that Milton should be one whit less high-minded and patriotic or less anxious

to see his ideals applied to practice. It may be as unseemly for politicians to grumble "as for the herdsmen of Admetus to complain of the presence among them of a god." Still we may regret that the god so lost his temper as to join in a mere "rough and tumble"; and, moreover, that he devoted so much energy to a fray in which, as he admits, he was fighting with his "left hand." No one ever saw more clearly what a long and arduous training was desirable for a great poet; but to be a great publicist, he assumed, it was enough to be in a towering passion. Professor Raleigh, indeed, argues ingeniously that it was good for Milton occasionally to give "a loose to his pen and his thought." "Irresponsible paradox and nonsense" may be "a useful and pleasant recreation-ground." I will not argue the point. To me it seems that fierce indignation might have been turned to better purposes. His good genius might have persuaded him to remain upon the level of his *Areopagitica* and to keep clear of the personalities which only injured his cause. But a man's good genius rarely secures the attention which he deserves. Without arguing "might-have-beens," we can admit that Milton was going through an ordeal which was not thrown away when it bore fruit in *Paradise Lost* and *Samson Agonistes*. The prose works are not easy reading;



but it is worth while to study them in order to understand more clearly the sources of the unapproachable majesty of Milton at his best. The heroic attitude of his last days shows the essentially noble elements of the old passion, and is in turn made intelligible by the previous emotion.

When Milton at last turned to his true function, and spoke to a backsliding generation as a prophet of high thinking, he had to fulfil two conditions: He was to announce a theodicy, or in his own words "to justify the ways of God to man"; and he had decided that his teaching was to be in the form of an epic poem. He therefore gives both a creed, as Professor Raleigh says, "and a cosmical scheme of imagination." The creed may not bear examination; but the scheme appears all the more wonderful as a work of art. "By the most delicate skill of architecture this gigantic filamented structure has been raised into the air. . . . That it should stand at all is the marvel, seeing that it is spanned on frail arches over the abyss of the impossible, the unnatural, and the grotesque." Milton's creed, of course, is the creed of contemporary theologians. He accepts unhesitatingly the speculative position represented by the Westminster divines. He holds, indeed, that most of them were wrong in their conclusions, but he has not the least doubt that truth is attainable by their

methods. A complete theodicy may be reached by hitting off the right mean between Calvin and Arminius. He is indeed so little of a philosopher that he is hardly aware of the difficulties. When Pope complains that "God the Father turns a school-divine" and asserts the compatibility of prescience and free-will, he does injustice, says Professor Raleigh, "to the scholastic philosophers. There was never one of them who could have walked into a metaphysical bramble-bush with the blind recklessness that Milton displays." This is perhaps an overstatement, for Milton is here simply repeating a familiar dogma of scholastic and contemporary divinity. But Pope, at any rate, is fully justified. To introduce the Creator as a moderator, if not as a disputant, in such discussions is certainly offensive, and shows the characteristic weakness of Milton's position. He not only accepts the dogmatism of the time at a period when it was already losing its hold upon the philosophic thinkers, but identifies it with the essence of religion. He holds, as Professor Raleigh puts it, that "everything is as plain as a pikestaff"; he is convinced that there are no mysteries in the government of the universe which cannot be solved by our dialectical skill. The weakness is connected with the most obvious limitations of Milton's intellect. In theology as in politics he

can be a thorough partisan, and supposes with the ordinary man that the whole truth can be packed into a dogma. That is partly due to his characteristic want of the sympathy which enables a man to see the world from other points of view. He is the exact antithesis to Shakespeare, who could throw himself into every character. He is equally incapable of the mysticism of some contemporaries. Professor Raleigh draws a striking contrast between the "solid materialism" of Milton's heroics and the spiritual vision of Vaughan the "Silurist." The interminable controversies of the day had led some keen intellects to scepticism and others to the mystical view which sees in all human dogmas and systems the "broken lights" of absolute truth. Milton remained an uncompromising and unhesitating dogmatist. The "scheme of salvation" could be expounded as clearly and definitively as a body of human law, though nobody but himself had perhaps hit upon precisely the right set of formulæ.

Milton's "theodicy," therefore, was already becoming obsolete; and even his first readers seem to have paid no attention to his merits or defects as a justifier of Providence. Indeed, the justification is obviously preposterous. The relations between man and his Creator are expressed, according to him, by a definite legal code. The

defect of *Paradise Lost*, says Bagehot, is that it is "founded on a political transaction." It treats of a rebellion against an absolute, and moreover an arbitrary, sovereign. The offence committed by Adam and Eve is an offence against a "positive" law, not against the essential principles of morality. As Professor Raleigh puts it, the ruler of the universe becomes a "whimsical tyrant," issuing commands from time to time, often utterly incapable of being carried out, and given merely to test the submissiveness of his subjects. The corruption of human nature is a Christian doctrine, the plausibility of which was admitted, as we have been lately reminded, by such a free-thinker as Huxley. With Milton it seems to be a superficial phenomenon. His morality usually rests upon a lofty sense of the dignity of human nature. "A pious and just honouring of ourselves," he says "is the radical moisture and fountain-head whence every laudable and worthy enterprise issues forth." He claims for himself an "honest haughtiness and self-esteem," "which let envy call pride." In *Paradise Lost*, Satan's pride has so strong an affinity to this honest haughtiness that we feel his error to have been rather of the head than of the heart. He has miscalculated his position, and applied a noble quality to a mistaken end. Milton, therefore,


has more real sympathy with the Stoic than with the Christian ethics. He tells us how, during his study of "Greek and Roman exploits," he had "found many things both worthily done and nobly spoken," but that when he turned to the history of the Church under a Christian emperor, he was amazed to find it all "quite contrary"—nothing but ambition, corruption, contention, combustion. The Catholic version of Christianity, at least, is altogether repugnant to him; and Newman couples Milton with Gibbon (not a very similar pair in other respects), "each breathing hatred to the Catholic Church in his own way; each a proud and rebellious creature of God; each gifted with incomparable gifts." Dislike to Milton was for that reason one of the "notes" of the literary representatives of the Oxford "movement."

If Milton took for pure Christianity a system into which it is hard to fit the doctrines of corruption or of humility, his heterodoxy was combined with the most absolute faith in the historical revelation. As his theodicy is also to be an epic, he has to make his "fable" out of the events entwined into the whole system of Protestant theology. The first chapter of Genesis, taken as literally and absolutely true, gives the catastrophe to the accomplishment of which the action of all the

characters concerned is exclusively directed. If, therefore, we are to accept the book as a serious theodicy, our interest must depend upon our belief in the facts. Milton's poem, says M. Scherer, is intended to support a thesis. We cannot separate the form from the contents in a didactic work. If the thesis collapses, the poem will cease to interest, except, of course, in its parentheses. Pattison argues that the change in our conceptions has already sapped our interest in the poetry, and that, if the process continues, the "possibility of epic illusion" will be lost. But why, one asks, should the decay in our belief be fatal to the poetry? We need not be pagans to enjoy the *Iliad*, and we may give up Dante's material hell without much loss of interest in the *Divina Commedia*. One possible answer is suggested in a striking passage of Ruskin. Milton's history, he declares, "is evidently unbelievable to himself." The war in heaven is adapted from Hesiod, and throughout the rest of the poem every artifice "of invention is visibly and consciously employed." Milton, of course, knew when he was inventing the allegory of Sin and Death that he was not writing history. The visions which he created could only be a projection upon his imagination of realities essentially beyond human perception. But we cannot doubt

that he believed that the visions reflected realities, and especially that the Biblical story of the Fall was true. He held his beliefs so strongly that the tortures of the Inquisition would not have extorted a recantation.

The question, however, from a poetical point of view is not whether he could believe, but whether, in modern phrase, he could "visualise" the objects of his belief; and in this respect, the contrast with Dante is significant. Dante can hardly have believed that his elaborate plan of the *Inferno* was precisely accurate. When a man is deliberately contriving an imaginary world, he cannot, unless he is actually insane, suppose that he is mapping a real world. He must know that he is creating, not surveying. But Dante's vision could, at any rate, be as distinct and definite as reality. The circles of hell are as visible to Dante, and therefore to us, as the streets of Florence, while Milton's scheme is so vague that he does not even know clearly whether the Ptolemaic or the Copernican system is correct. And the reason is obvious: Dante was a profounder student of theology and philosophy than Milton; but he does not mix his philosophy with his statement of facts. Throughout his journey, he is still in presence of matters of fact, which, however startling, are continuous with the realities of actual experience. The



problems about free-will and foreknowledge are not supposed to be solved by stating the facts. He may be "justifying Providence" in the sense that his personages obviously (to him at least) deserve what they get; but he does not profess to explain why there should be a hell and a purgatory and a heaven. They are there, and we must behave accordingly. Milton, on the contrary, has to be at one and the same time a philosopher and a historian. He tells a story as the embodiment of a dogmatic system. The supernatural characters must be anthropomorphic for the purposes of poetry, but they are also principles of a philosophy. Milton, we are told, believed sincerely that the pagan gods were the fallen angels. Still, the devils have almost become personified abstractions of pride, greed, and lust. In his early drafts of a drama, Milton has a number of such actors as Death, Hatred, Conscience, Faith, Hope, and Charity. Though they become angels and devils in the actual poem, Satan is still abstract enough to hold conversation with Sin and Death. The devils are utterly unlike the concrete and grotesque devils of mediæval superstition. They not only discuss metaphysical puzzles, but are themselves metaphysical entities. The difficulty reaches its height when it compels him to introduce the Creator as an actor in the



story, and leads to those strange incongruities upon which it is needless to dwell. If we do not accuse him of profanity, it is because he is plainly abashed by his own daring. Most people—in spite of enthusiastic critics—agree with Johnson that no one ever wished *Paradise Lost* longer. Readers are generally bored when a poet is bored himself; and Milton, if not bored, is clearly writing under constraint, which has much the same effect. His imagination, if not quenched, is paralysed. He has to cling closely to the text, or moves cautiously, and diverges into a commonplace historical summary. The contrast between the incomparable majesty of the opening, and the flagging which begins when he ventures into heaven, makes itself felt in spite of the continued dignity of style.

The criticism represented by Addison did not trouble itself with this problem. The theodicy dropped out of sight. Addison, indeed, though he declines to admit with Le Bossu that every epic poet “pitches upon a certain moral” as a starting-point, agrees that from every “just heroic poem” some one great moral may be deduced. *Paradise Lost* teaches us the unexceptionable but simple moral that obedience to the will of God makes men happy. But the metaphysical problem which Milton took himself to be solving was handed

over to the directly didactic poets. Addison takes occasion to puff the good Whig Blackmore, whose poem on the "Creation" confuted Lucretius and supplied the reasoning omitted in the seventh book of *Paradise Lost*. Pope was to take up the task of "vindicating" the "ways of God to man." He "vindicates" instead of "justifies," as Warburton explains, because he "has to deal with unbelievers." The controversies of his day had made it impossible to fuse the theodicy with the epic. The epic poem therefore came to be treated, in spite of Le Bossu's moral, as simply a work of art, to which the justification of Providence is really irrelevant. Homer, Virgil, and Milton, it is assumed, devised the "fables" and the "machinery" of their poems by an equally deliberate and artificial process, though in the two first cases the pagan mythology, and in the last the book of Genesis, supplied the necessary materials. The epic poem, no doubt, was becoming slightly absurd, as is shown by the famous recipe in Martinus Scriblerus. Still it was accepted as the highest form of poetry; and when Wilkie in 1757 published the *Epigoniad*, he was hailed by the patriotic Hume as a "Scottish Homer." That poetry was quite independent of the vitality of the conceptions which it embodied, was taken to be too obvious for demonstration. *Paradise Lost* was

accepted on these terms simply as the noblest English specimen of the class; and if Johnson shows a certain sense that Milton had been too daring in venturing into the highest regions, the audacity was pardonable in the absence of any irreverent intention. Ordinary readers could shut their eyes to incongruities and refuse to see profanity where so clearly none was intended. The critic could take *Paradise Lost* simply as an epic, and the ordinary reader accepted it as a kind of gorgeous paraphrase of the book of Genesis.

In more modern times, the difficulties presented by the combination have obviously increased. Are we to admit with Pattison that our interest in the poetry will inevitably be sapped; or can we throw ourselves back into his intellectual position sufficiently to revive the classic for the time? We may, it is suggested, arrive at "that willing suspension of disbelief for the moment which constitutes poetic faith." That is a difficult attitude of mind to preserve. The truth, I think, is indicated by Professor Raleigh in a striking remark. The more we study *Paradise Lost* the more we see the hand of the author. "The epic poem, which in its natural form is a kind of cathedral for the ideas of a nation, is by him transformed into a chapel-of-ease for his own mind, a monument to his own genius and to his



own habits of thought." As the tombs of the Medici suggest—not Lorenzo or Giovanni, but—Michel Angelo, *Paradise Lost* suggests Milton; and "the same dull convention that calls *Paradise Lost* a religious poem might call them Christian statues." The denial that *Paradise Lost* is a religious poem would have startled Milton and many modern disciples. It should perhaps be qualified by saying that it represents Milton's religion, and is one product of very genuine convictions of the day which had varying outcomes in the faiths of Cromwell and Baxter and George Fox, and again in that of the more narrow and bigoted Puritans. To define its essential nature would be a very difficult and very interesting problem. The inference, however, remains. To read *Paradise Lost* without a shock, we must not only "suspend disbelief" but get rid of our positive beliefs. We must forget as far as possible that the supernatural actors are really the personages suggested by the names. So long as we are in hell, that is easy. We are in presence of gigantic figures, with heroic impulses and intelligible motives—if only we do not ask too closely what was the warfare in which they were engaged. When we venture to the highest regions, the discord is harder to resolve; and we are painfully aware that Milton is writing "in fetters."

This, in fact, is implied in the opinion which Professor Raleigh shares with the best critics since Dryden's day, that Satan is the hero of the poem. If *Paradise Lost* be really a religious poem, that would seem to imply a stupendous blunder somewhere; and yet it is inevitable. Johnson quaintly praises Milton because "there is in Satan's speeches little that can give pain to a pious ear." That is perhaps the last compliment that we could have expected the genuine devil to deserve. In fact, it is impossible not to feel a strong admiration for so heroic a being, and to be even glad that he has found so sympathetic, we might say so loving, a portrait-painter. The first book of *Paradise Lost* holds the very first place in English, if not in all existing, poetry; and the marvellous passage in which the "Dread Commander" presents himself to his comrades enthralled the imagination and casts into utter oblivion the irrelevant question as to the accidental goodness or badness of his cause. He is not only himself the embodiment of heroic endurance, but obviously deserves the absolute confidence of his followers. He preserves his grandeur even when he is detected in stratagems, and rises to meet overpowering enemies

Like Teneriff or Atlas unremov'd.

We have, in short, to put aside our theological

and philosophical prepossessions; to be content without forcing Milton's imagery into too close a contact with fact or asking too curiously who are the personages and what their motives. We must accept the transcendent grandeur of the actors, and admit in general that the grandeur is somehow the outcome of Milton's own character. His poetry is like the "spectre of the Brocken"—a gigantic shape which is really a reflection of himself.

Yet Milton's conviction that he is in some sense writing true history has important results, admirably explained by Professor Raleigh. Milton's method is at the opposite pole to Shakespeare's. He gives the general type, where Shakespeare gives the concrete individual. He describes the emotion excited, where Shakespeare gives the specific details which excite the emotion. The danger of the Shakespearian method is that it may suggest grotesque and trivial associations and injure the unity and symmetry of the whole. Milton's method involves the danger of becoming vague and insipid. The general is apt to be commonplace. Milton, as Professor Raleigh points out with great clearness, is saved from this weakness by his "concrete epic realities." Keats's *Hyperion*, he says, fails by want of Milton's "exact physical system." The world in which the history takes place is so shadowy and indefinite

that there is "nothing for the poem to hang on by." Milton is anthropomorphic and materialistic, and in his posthumous treatise explicitly defends the corresponding principles. Even in heaven events happen in the time and place of human chronology and geography—though at vast distances. The angels and devils, therefore, though vast and shadowy, have still tangible clothing of flesh and blood. They do not become properly abstractions, however nearly they approach that consummation. They are but highly generalised types. Milton has "no deep sense of mystery." His figures are of superhuman proportions, but vagueness and dim visions of remote perspectives take the place of the properly mystic. There is always a firm and definite outline behind the shadowy figure; Death has a head and a crown, though they are such as become a phantom. Milton's weakness in metaphysics, and his undoubting acceptance of rigid dogmas, naturally go with the conviction that he is dealing with history and fact; and, so to speak, prevent the poetry from evaporating in the thin air of philosophical concepts. Hence we have one aspect of the extraordinary power in which Milton is unrivalled. "His natural port," as Johnson puts it, "is gigantic loftiness"; and every critic has to say the same and illustrate it by the same famous

passages. The famous "Far off his coming shone" is enough to recall his special power of concentrating the most majestic effects in a single image. It would be idle to insist upon this specially Miltonic magic, which, besides informing particular passages, animates the whole poem and gives a fainter glory even where we cannot deny the flagging power.

How, precisely, is this effect produced? Critics would fain get beyond generalities, and seek to detect the finer secret of Milton's power in the style which reflects his idiosyncrasy. Sometimes they investigate the mechanism of the versification and hope to learn something from minute examination of Milton's stresses and "assonances" and alliterations. Professor Raleigh remarks that the passage describing the heavenward procession, in the seventh book, would "justify an entire treatise." A treatise would be amply justified if it could really reveal the secret of the music. Professor Raleigh appears, however, to admit that the prospect is a bad one; the "laws of music in verse are very subtle . . . and, it must be added, very imperfectly ascertained." Are they ascertained at all? Or, if ascertained, would they help us? There can, of course, be no doubt that a poet must have the musical power. Milton could not have produced his organ-tones on a "scrannel



pipe"; and a character of equal grandeur might have been combined with as little power of expression as was possessed by Cromwell. But a consideration of the instrument abstractedly, apart from the performer, can tell us little. It could only reveal that part of the charm of the poem which depends upon the sound, and which would be equally enjoyable in "nonsense verses" or to a foreigner ignorant of the meaning. That is a very small part of the charm of *Paradise Lost*. The musical power is an essential condition of uttering the thought effectually, hard as it may be to explain the connection. But the ultimate secret must always lie in the grandeur of the thought, without which the best verses would be mere jingle; and no skill in arranging sibilants and aspirates and labials can be a substitute for the poetic inspiration.


When a man is moved by the "serious and hearty love of truth, his words, like so many nimble and airy servitors, trip about him at command, and in well-ordered files, as he would wish, fall aptly into their own places." Milton is speaking of his prose, and, of course, laboured his poetic style most carefully. Only, the words followed the thought. Professor Raleigh describes admirably the characteristic results. He points out how every word is of value: "In Milton's versifi-



cation there is no mortar between the stones; each is held in place by the weight of the others, and helps to uphold the building." Milton himself says that one secret lies partly in the "sense variously drawn out from one verse into another." "He varies the verse," says Professor Raleigh, "till he has hardly a rule left, save the iambic pattern, which he treats merely as a point of departure and reference, a background or framework to carry the variations imposed upon it by the luxuriance of perfectly composed art." The metre is like the canvas which shows through the pictures woven in tapestry. In some early blank verse the sentence is forced to conform to the music; while the later Elizabethans had taken such licences that the verse became indistinguishable from prose. When Milton, for the first time, applied blank verse to a great narrative poem, he entirely reformed this laxity and reached the perfect balance, in which the sentences and the line reciprocally strengthen each other. No one has ever equalled him in this. The "secret is lost"—as Professor Raleigh puts it—or, rather, no later poet has possessed the delicate instinct which arranged Milton's words in their "well-ordered files." The "secret" was never expressible in a formula. It means simply that Milton had a marvellous ear; but even if we could assign certain

"laws of verse" which he unconsciously obeyed, we should still be as far as ever from the power of applying them.

Milton is a master of the "grand style" because the exquisite ear was also at the service of a character of unique dignity, moved by intense convictions, contemptuous of all that was mean and trivial; hard, dogmatic, and unsympathetic, but constantly under the stress of intense and massive emotion, which finds its natural clothing in his unequalled diction. The impossibility of adopting the diction when the thought is feeble is curiously illustrated by Milton's influence on the eighteenth century. Professor Raleigh declares that "English verse went Milton-mad" during the reign of Pope, and exemplifies the remark abundantly from such men as Thomson, Young, and Akenside. Milton is partly responsible for the mannerism which excited Wordsworth's revolt. Addison already gives the theory. A poet, he says, who seeks for "perspicuity" alone is in danger of becoming vulgar. He must avoid that fault by "guarding himself against idiomatic ways of speaking"; and for that purpose, among other expedients, he may use the idioms of other languages; as Milton indulges in Latinisms, and in grammatical inversions. To the school of Pope "perspicuity" became the cardinal virtue,



as suited to an age in which the imagination was kept in strict bondage by the reason; and Pope's language was simply that of the most cultivated society of the day. It was quite adequate for purposes of satire or argument in verse: when, that is, the metre was used only to give point and smartness to the substance of prose. But when the writer was ambitious of some more distinctively poetic effect, he had to "raise his language" by some judicious artifice. Pascal had shown how this is done. As men do not know, he says, in what poetic beauty consists, they invent "certains termes bizarres, 'sicle d'or, merveille de nos jours, fatal laurier, bel astre,' etc., et on appelle ce jargon beauté poétique." So shepherds in English become "conscious swains," and their sheep are the "flocks that graze the verdant mead." *Paradise Lost* for such purposes was an invaluable treasure-house, and applicable almost in proportion to the prosaic nature of the subject. The excellent Dr. Grainger undertook to write a didactic poem about the sugar-cane. He had written, so Boswell tells us, "Now muse, let 's sing of mice"; and substituted "rats" for "mice" as more dignified. But he made a more promising attempt when he echoed Milton—

Spirit of Inspiration, that didst lead  
Th' Ascrean poet to the sacred mount, etc.

Thomson, says Professor Raleigh, is like a man trying to win a wager by describing the country without giving the plain name to a single object. Birds for example become "the feathered nations." Pope, as afterwards Gray, often laid hands upon Milton, though both were well enough read in poetry to convey spoils from many other authors. Gray's excessive use of personification—the practice which culminated in Coleridge's favourite "Inoculation, heavenly maid"—illustrates the process in another way. When Voltaire set up as an epic poet, he had to use for his "machinery" such personages as "La Discorde," "La Politique," and "Le Fanatisme," instead of Satan and Beelzebub. Milton's famous precept, that poetry should be "simple, sensuous, and passionate," became impossible when passion had to be made logical and the abstract concept took the place of the "sensuous" imagery. The peculiar jargon of Ossian which especially irritated Wordsworth might suggest other illustrations of the difficulty of "raising the language." The tendency of poetry to fall into the dead flat of rhymed prose was so strong that men who, like Thomson, had true poetic feeling, had to catch at some distinguishing mark, and used an artifice which could be adopted by men like Grainger, with no poetic feeling at all. Milton's turn of phrase could be

imitated, and became a mere trick when divorced from the thought. Milton, says Professor Raleigh, invented a system of preternaturally majestic diction, perfectly fitted for the utterance of his own conceptions, but, when divorced from those conceptions, so monstrously artificial in effect that his imitators and followers, hoisting themselves on the Miltonic stilts, brought the very name of "poetic diction" into a contempt that lasted for more than a century and is not yet wholly extinct.

We should qualify this judgment by adding that they had to find some stilts; and that, if their gait was awkward on the inappropriate elevation, Milton's magnificent power helped to preserve an ideal of poetic excellence through a period in which the highest sources of inspiration were almost closed by the general attitude of thought. I return, in short, to the point from which I started. When we criticise Milton as a religious poet, as the expounder of a theodicy or the creator of an epic, we are forced to justify admiration at the cost of condoning palpable absurdities. It becomes evident that we must rather seek to justify ourselves by showing what a surpassing power was manifested in spite of innumerable trammels imposed by the task and by the conditions of thought which made his conception of it inevitable. The diction is admirable because it gives the man himself, but, for that reason, could

be effectively used by no one but himself. The gigantic figure stands out more clearly by the help of his last interpreter; though Professor Raleigh would be the first to admit that to see Milton clearly is not to explain him. The full analysis of a personality is beyond the reach of any psychologist. I can only say that Professor Raleigh's portrait is among the most lifelike in existence; and that he has discussed many interesting topics at which I have not been able even to glance.

## Emerson

MANY years ago I had the chance of laying up an interesting reminiscence. Lowell took me to visit Emerson in his house at Concord, and, as it happened, had to leave me to perform the function of an interviewer by myself. But instead of recording an impression I have to make a confession. I was young enough at that time to believe in great authors, and to desire to offer acceptable incense. Unluckily, I had not read a word of Emerson, and on the way I had innocently confided to Lowell that I took him to be a kind of Carlyle. I did not know that Lowell had drawn an inimitably witty contrast between the two, beginning—

There are persons, mole-blind to the soul's make and style,  
Who insist on a likeness 'twixt him and Carlyle.

Though he did not accuse me of "mole-blindness," Lowell managed to intimate courteously that I was somehow in the dark. The sense of my ignorance struck me dumb. The brilliant remark which was to show at once that I appreciated



Emerson and that my appreciation was worth having, refused to present itself. What Emerson thought of the intruder I know not, but our conversation fell hopelessly flat; and I was a happy man when Lowell relieved guard. I came away, indeed, with a certain impression of my host's personal simplicity and dignity. If I had not offered homage he had not shown the least wish that I should fall upon my knees, and had received me as at least a human being—a claim upon his courtesy which he admitted like a true democrat. Still, I was left with a problem unsolved. Emerson's ablest countrymen, I found, were never tired of expressing their gratitude to him. He had pronounced their "literary Declaration of Independence." His first lectures had made an epoch. He had removed the scales from their eyes, revealed the barrenness of the intellectual wilderness in which they had been wandering, and given them a Pisgah-sight of a new land "flowing with freedom's honey and milk." The question remained: What was the secret of his power? Then and since I have tried to answer it, partly by the obvious expedient of reading his books, and partly by reading various criticisms. I hope that I have learned something, in spite of grave disqualifications. I was not impressed at the impressible age, and do not in

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any case belong to the class which takes most freely the impression of the Emersonian stamp. Yet it may be of some interest to more congenial disciples to know how their prophet affects one of the profane vulgar. If some rays from the luminary can pierce the opaque medium of my Philistinism it will show their intrinsic brilliance.

Matthew Arnold characteristically explained to an American audience that Emerson was not a great poet, nor a great philosopher, nor even a great man of letters. For all that, he was the friend and aider "of those who would live in the spirit." Perhaps the phrase is a little vague, though it, no doubt, indicates the truth. Emerson was the founder and leader of the American "Transcendentalists," and Transcendentalists, I suppose, were people who professed to "live in the spirit." The name is alarming, but it represents a very harmless and a very commendable phenomenon. In Emerson's youth, his countrymen were in need of a sharp intellectual shock. Their understanding, in Coleridgean phrase—the faculty which is useful in clearing forests and accumulating dollars—was thoroughly wide-awake; but their reason—the faculty which cultivates poetry and "divine philosophy"—had somehow sunk into slumber. A vague craving for better things had been roused, though by no leader with authorita-

tive credentials. There were no trained professors profoundly learned in the past history of thought to come forward and propound new solutions of the enigma of the universe. Active but superficially educated youths were ready to take for a beacon any light, ancient or modern, of which they happened to catch a glimpse. Some enthusiasts had vague impressions that there was such a thing as German philosophy, and had heard of Schelling through Cousin or Coleridge. One swore by Pythagoras; and others took up Plotinus, or found what they wanted in Swedenborg or in Jacob Behmen, or set up some mystic doctrine of their own. "Transcendentalism" took its name from Kant, but implied no familiarity with Kant's special metaphysical system. It meant a "wave of sentiment"—a vague desire for some kind of intellectual flying machine—some impulse that would lift you above the prosaic commonplace world into the charmed regions of philosophy and poetry. Emerson had no more academical training than his followers, and, in one sense, was certainly not a "great philosopher." If "philosophy" means such a logical system as was worked out by Kant or Hegel, he was not a philosopher at all. He positively disliked such philosophies. "Who," he asked, "has not looked into a metaphysical book? And what sensible man ever

looked twice?" You may collate and distil all the systems, he declared, and you will get nothing by it. We have as yet nothing but "tendency and indication." Systems are merely the outside husk, worthless except as a temporary embodiment of the essential truth. Emerson, that is, is a denizen of the region where philosophy is not differentiated from poetry. "I am," he said, "in all my theory, ethics, and politics, a poet"; and he ridicules the impression that his "transcendentalism" was, as some people fancied, "a known and fixed element, like salt or meal"—a rigid and definite creed. All the argument and all the wisdom, he declares, is not in the treatise on metaphysics, "but in the sonnet or the play." Transcendentalism, indeed, had its philosophical affinities: it represented idealism as against materialism; or, as Emerson occasionally puts it, takes the side of Plato against Locke. Lockism is the influx of "decomposition and prose," while Platonism means growth. The Platonic is the poetic tendency; the "so-called scientific" is the negative and poisonous. Spenser, Burns, Byron, and Wordsworth will be Platonists; and "the dull men will be Lockists."

The average American had fallen into such "Lockism," and Emerson, when he came to England, found the fully-blown type flourishing


and triumphant. The "brilliant Macaulay," he said, represented the spirit of the governing classes, and Macaulay had explicitly declared (in his essay on Bacon) that "good" meant simply solid, sensual benefits—good food and good clothes and material comfort. Emerson does not argue with men in whom the faculty of vision is non-existent or clouded by want of use. He is content simply to see. One result is indicated in the charming correspondence with Carlyle. Each most cordially appreciated the merits of the other, and Carlyle, like Emerson, called himself a "mystic," and soared above "Lockism." But the visions of the two took a very different colouring. Emerson praises *Sartor Resartus* with a characteristic qualification. Carlyle's grim humour and daring flights of superabundant imagination cover a "simple air," he complains, with a "volley of variations." You are, he says, dispensing "that which is rarest, the simplest truths, truths which lie next to consciousness, which only the Platos and the Goethes perceive," and he hopes for the hour "when the word will be as simple and so as resistless as the thought"; for the hour, that is, when a Carlyle will be an Emerson. To find effective utterance for these "simplest truths" is, in fact, Emerson's special function. The difficulty of the task is proverbial. A simple truth is

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a very charming thing; but it has an uncomfortable trick of sinking into a truism. If you try to make it something more it is apt to collide with other simple truths. The function of the system-maker is to persuade the various truths to keep the peace by assigning to each its proper limits and stating it with due reserves and qualifications. But that is precisely what Emerson altogether declines to do. The most obvious peculiarity of his style corresponds. His lectures are a "mosaic" of separate sentences; each, as he put it himself, an "infinitely repellent particle." Carlyle, praising the beauty and simplicity of his sentences, complains that the paragraph is not a "beaten ingot," but "a beautiful square bag of duckshot held together by canvas." Proverbs, says Emerson, are statements of an absolute truth, and thus the sanctuary of the intuitions. They are, indeed, absolute statements of truth; and for that reason, as Sancho Panza might have pointed out, you can always quote a proverb on each side of every alternative. Solomon tells us to answer and also not to answer a fool according to his folly. "More haste, worse speed" is true; but it is equally true that "the early bird catches the worm." Emerson is a master of the gnomic utterances which are to the cultivated what proverbs are to the vulgar. He is well aware that they are not always recon-

cilable; but it is not his function to reconcile them. He cares nothing for consistency. He wishes to say what he feels to-day with "the proviso that to-morrow, perhaps, I shall contradict it all." "A foolish consistency is the hobgoblin of little minds. . . . With consistency a great soul has nothing whatever to do. . . . Speak what you think now in hard words, and to-morrow speak what to-morrow thinks in hard words again, though it contradict everything you said to-day." The peculiarity seems to have annoyed his friends with a turn for logic. Argument was for him an absurdity. He approved as a rule for a debating society (what often enough corresponds to the practice) that no one should reply to a previous speaker. You thought that you had contradicted him; he placidly accepted both your statements and his own. He is simply playing a different tune, not denying that yours may be harmonious. The region of simple truths would seem to be altogether above the sphere in which controversy is possible. You should never conform to a church or sect, or to public opinion or to your own past utterances. Leave the truths to assimilate by spontaneous affinity.

One charm of Emerson is due to this affable reception of all opinions. On his first appearance in a pulpit he is described as "the most gracious of



mortals, with a face all benignity," and preached with an indefinite air of simplicity and wisdom. His lectures radiate benignity and simplicity. He has no dogmas to proclaim or heretics to denounce. He is simply uttering an inspiration which has come to him. He is not a mystagogue, affecting supernatural wisdom, and in possession of the only clue to the secret. If you sympathise, well and good; if you cannot, you may translate his truth into your own. The ascent into this serene region, above all the noise of controversy, has its disadvantages. Carlyle complains gently that his friend is in danger of parting from fact and soaring into perilous altitudes. He is "soliloquising on the mountain tops." It is easy to "screw one's self up into high and ever higher altitudes of transcendentalism," to see nothing beneath one but "the everlasting snows of the Himalaya, the earth shrinking to a planet, and the indigo firmament sowing itself with stars." Come back to the earth, he exclaims; and readers of Emerson must occasionally echo the exhortation. And yet, in his own way, Emerson was closer to the everyday world than Carlyle himself; and it is the curious union of the two generally inconsistent qualities which gives a peculiar flavour to Emersonian teaching. Lowell puts it admirably in his comparison of Emerson and Carlyle:—



C. gives nature and God his own fits of the blues,  
And rims common-sense things with mystical hues;  
E. sits in a mystery calm and intense,  
And looks coolly round him with calm common-sense;  
C. shows you how everyday matters unite  
With the dim trans-diurnal recesses of night;  
While E., in a plain preternatural way,  
Makes mysteries matters of mere every day.

Emerson's curious position of equilibrium between the two worlds of mystery and broad daylight comes out in his literary tastes. His reading was wide but desultory. He was entirely free from the superstition which besets the ordinary scholar and makes him unhappy till he has read a book through and got it up as a student gets up a book for an examination. Emerson looks for inspiration, not for information. He puts a book down as soon as it bores him, and does not care a straw for its authenticity or for the place assigned to it in the orthodox literary tribunals. He is content if it "makes his top spin"—as he says—if, that is, it stimulates thought or fires the imagination. "What is best in literature," he says, "is the affirming, prophesying, spermatic words of men-making poets." Shakespeare is to be valued not because he is so much greater than yourself, but because, by your receptivity of him, you become aware of the power of your own soul. To Emerson the value of a book is measured by its

dynamic effect upon himself. For some great names he cared little. The list of uninteresting writers included Shelley, Aristophanes, Cervantes, Miss Austen, and Dickens. He thought Dante a prodigy, but fitter for a museum than for a welcome to your own study. In compensation he is sometimes strangely enthusiastic about very obscure people. In speaking of literature in England, his appreciation of his friend Carlyle is checked by his dislike of the Carlylian pessimism; but he finds one consolation. There is a writer whose mind has "a long Atlantic roll not known except in the deepest water"; and who is elsewhere declared to have a "vigour of understanding and imagination comparable only to Lord Bacon's." This cheering exception to British stupidity turns out, to our surprise, to be a Mr. Wilkinson. I confess that I am not acquainted with his works, which, according to Emerson, "had thrown all contemporary philosophy in England into the shade." Wilkinson (a man of real ability, as a biographical dictionary informs me) had impressed Emerson by his exposition of Swendenborg. When Emerson made Swedenborg himself one of his representative men, Carlyle had to exclaim: "*Missed* the consummate flower and divine ultimate elixir of philosophy, say you? By heaven, in clutching at it and almost getting

it he has tumbled into Bedlam!" Emerson would apparently reply not by denying the truth of the remark, but by declaring it to be irrelevant. Swedenborg, like other prophets, fell into absurdities when he became a system-monger, and Emerson could condemn some of the results sharply enough. He was not the less grateful for the inspirations because associated with absurdities which might qualify the prophet for Bedlam. Swedenborg's leading thought, he says, is given in Milton's lines:

What if earth  
Be but the shadow of heaven, and things therein  
Each to the other more like than on earth is  
thought?


Swedenborg, he thinks, was the first to give a scientific statement of the poetical doctrine of "symbolism." He had inverted the point of view of the "poisonous" kind of science. The ideal world is the reality, and the material world should be regarded as merely a kind of "picture language." Emerson wonders that when this fruitful seed of thought was once sown men did not put by all other science to work out the results. Yet people continue to take more interest in examining every spider, or fossil, or fungus, than in trying to discover "the meaning and upshot of the frame of things." It may be, he thinks, that



centuries will be required to elaborate so profound a conception.

The impression made upon Emerson by this doctrine appears both in his own teaching and in numerous references to Swedenborg as one of the greatest leaders of thought, to be classed with the Platos and Shakespeares; and yet Emerson is equally attracted by men to whom mysticism would be another name for nonsense. From his boyhood he had studied Montaigne, another of his "representative men," of whom he speaks with a kind of personal affection. Montaigne appears in the *Representative Men* as the typical "sceptic"; and scepticism goes rather awkwardly with mysticism and the imperative claims of direct intuition of simple truths. Yet Emerson finds scepticism congenial so far as it implies toleration. It represents contempt for the formalism and exaggeration of "bigots and blockheads"; and every superior mind must pass through this "domain of equilibration." He delights, therefore, in Montaigne's hospitable reception of every conceivable variety of opinion. Montaigne, it is true, not only begins but ends with doubt. "*Que sçais-je!*" is his last word. But then, it is his superlative merit to admit frankly that there are doubts, instead of trying to smother them. The difference seems to be that, while Montaigne remains balanced

between opposite opinions, Emerson seems to hold that, though opposed, they may both be true. If we can rise to a higher sphere we shall see that they are complementary instead of contradictory. But Montaigne has evidently another charm for Emerson. His amazing frankness, his delight in laying bare all his own weaknesses, makes his *Essays* an incomparable text-book for the student of human nature. Montaigne has no literary affectation; he talks rather than writes. "Cut his words and they would bleed; they are vascular and alive." Montaigne plays no antics; he is "stout and solid; tastes every moment of the day; likes pain because it makes him feel himself and realise things, as we pinch ourselves to know that we are awake." If Emerson could soar into mystic regions, he is equally delighted with the broad daylight, in which you can see the actual everyday play of human nature, stripped bare of every sort of conventional disguise. The man of genius, he says, must draw strength from pure reason, and his aim from common-sense. The two poles are equally necessary, if he is not to be either too mean or too vague. That, again, is one of the merits which he sees in Plato. Plato is the "balanced soul." He combines the mystical and the practical element. He can be transcendental, and yet is at home in common life. He



can illustrate his philosophy from the world which philosophers despise: "from mares and puppies, from pitchers and soup-ladles; from cooks and criers; the shops of potters, horse-doctors, butchers, and fishmongers." It is this synthesis or equal poise between two opposite poles of thought which stamps his genius as unique. Yet Emerson can be equally impressed by men who represent only one side of the antithesis. He makes, perhaps, more references to Napoleon than to any one except Swedenborg. Napoleon is "the man of the world"; "the idol of common men, because he had the common qualities in a transcendent degree." He hated sentiment and despised "ideologists"; he had no moral scruples and no magnanimity. But his supreme practical ability, his "enormous self-trust," his power of seeing to the heart of things, his readiness to meet every emergency and "two o'clock in the morning courage" command our respect. "I find it easy," says Emerson, "to translate all his technics into all of mine." There is more philosophy in his despatches than in the sermons of the Academy. "We like everything to do its office, whether it be a milch-cow or a rattlesnake"; and Napoleon at least represents a stupendous natural force. Emerson was fond of reading books upon Napoleon. They were at any rate instructive

documents in the study of character. The list of authors recommended in his lecture upon "Books" is characteristic. You must, of course, read the great poets. But his special favourites are, on one side, Plotinus and the Neoplatonists, and on the other, the books which give an insight into character. Plutarch, both the *Lives* and the *Morals* should be in the smallest library; confessions and autobiographies, Augustine, Benvenuto Cellini, and Rousseau, the table-talks of Luther, or Selden, or Coleridge, and books of anecdotes are invaluable. Anybody, meanwhile, will do for history: Hume and Goldsmith as well as Gibbon. History represents merely the background in which the great lives are set; and what you should really want is to be brought into contact with inspiring minds, not to get up dates and external facts. Emerson is weak in criticism, if the critic is to give a judicial estimate of a man's proper position in the development of poetry or philosophy; but he can say most clearly and forcibly what is the message which any great writer has delivered to him personally.

This, I think, shows how one may approach one secret of reading Emerson himself. He combines Yankee shrewdness in singular fashion with the exaltation of the mystic. The mysticism is bewildering, if not simply nonsensical, to the poor

"Lockist" or the average common-sense mortal. If asked to accept it as a systematic creed, he will declare that it is mere theosophical moonshine: too vague to have any meaning, or meaning something which is palpably absurd. But, then, one may also read Emerson as Emerson read his predecessors: for stimulus or inspiration, not as a propounder of solid, substantial truths. We are not to take his philosophy for a system of truths, but for a series of vivid intuitions. His Declaration of Independence proclaims a truth which may be stated in many dialects. Like its political parallel, it asserts that every man has indisputable rights, to be abrogated by no human authority. But it is not aggressive or dogmatic. It does not remind us of Fourth of July celebrations, which treated George III. like a grotesque Guy Fawkes. The emancipation is to be effected not by iconoclasm, but by rousing the slumbering faculties. It implies a duty to yourself, as well as a right against your rulers. The enemy to be overcome is the torpor which accepts traditions and conventions as ultimate. They benumb the soul, and make it a part of a dead mechanism, when it should be a part of the living force which moulds the world. You should be an active instead of a passive agent in that process; you must be, in his phrase, "self-reliant"; you must




develop your own powers and obey your instincts, without submitting to any external rule. You then become a "ripple of the stream of tendency." "Beware," he says, "when the great God lets loose a thinker on this planet." The new thought represents a "new influx of divinity into the mind." The doctrine is sometimes expressed in language learned from the mystics. The beautiful state of the soul is measured by its capacity for "ecstasy." Every man is capable of divine illumination, and can be elevated by intercourse with the spiritual world. The "ecstasy" corresponds to the "inner light" of the Quakers. It recalls, as he says, "the trances of Socrates, Plotinus, Porphyry, Behmen, Fox, Bunyan, Pascal, Guyon, and Swedenborg." The "rapt saint," he declares, is the only logician; not exhortation, not argument, becomes our lips, but "pæans of joy and praise." He speaks of the ecstatic state with a kind of awe in the essay on "Self-reliance" as something which cannot be fully uttered. "The soul raised over passion beholds identity and Eternal causation, perceives the self-existence of truth and right, and calms itself with knowing that all things go well."

Certainly Emerson is on the threshold of mysticism. His peculiarity is that he stops there. He does not lose his balance. He respects common-

sense, and dreads to disturb his vague aspirations by translating them into a definite system. He does not wish us to swallow mystic formulas as necessary or sufficient keys to the puzzle. He is only saying with benevolent unction what corresponds to Carlyle's fierce denunciations of cants and shams and may even be translated into the phraseology of the humble "Lockist." The Lockist, too, is aware of the evil of dead "survivals," and the importance of encouraging new intellectual variations. The difference between his prose and Emerson's poetry is great enough; but he may sympathise with the spirit, at least, of the rapture with which Emerson sets forth the blessings of intellectual independence, and the need that an individual be true to himself. Emerson's version was congenial to his audience at the time. One can understand the nature of the stimulus, even if we do not quite appreciate the merits of the "ecstatic state."

In one of its aspects, Emerson's philosophy or poetry, whichever be its proper name, has scandalised his critics. His optimism, they think, is irritating. The most hopeless of all consolations is the denial that there is any need for consolation. The latter-day philosopher prefers thorough-going pessimism, and scornfully rejects Emerson's futile attempts to ignore the dark side of the world.

Undoubtedly Emerson was an unequivocal optimist. "My whole philosophy, which is very real," he said to Carlyle, "teaches acquiescence and optimism." He laments his "stammering tongue and fumbling fingers," but he is not going to commit or recommend suicide. When men degrade each other, and desponding doctrines are spread, the "scholar," he said, in one of the early epoch-making lectures, "must be a bringer of hope, and must reinforce man against himself." "Power," he says elsewhere, "dwells with cheerfulness. . . . A man should make life and nature happier to us or he had better have never been born." All the talent in the world, he declares, cannot save a Schopenhauer from being odious. I confess that I do not altogether dislike this old-fashioned creed. It suited, no doubt, the time and place. America, it has been said, is the land of hope; and in Emerson's youth some symptoms which alarm modern observers were hardly perceptible. When he came to England in 1847, he was shocked by the "tragic spectacles" of misery and degradation in the streets of the great towns, and thanked God that his children were being brought up in a land where such things were unknown. The external circumstances help to explain the difference between him and Carlyle, upon whom the English pauperism and squalor




had impressed the opposite lesson. But, apart from the surroundings, optimism is clearly of the essence of Emerson's temperament and philosophy. It is the teaching of the "ecstatic state." Wordsworth's nature-worship lifted him to the "blessed mood" in which the

burthen of the mystery  
Of all this unintelligible world  
Is lightened,

and enabled him to "see into the life of things," and the harmony of the universe. With Emerson the "blessed mood" becomes normal. The greatest teachers have seen that "all nature is the rapid efflux of goodness executing and organising itself." He frequently, it has been said, speaks as an evolutionist before Darwin. But for him evolution is rather emanation, and it does not mean a blind struggle for existence, but the regular unrolling of a divine and benevolent drama, implying steady progress to perfection. Evil, he can declare, is only privation. It has no real existence, and vanishes when you can see the whole instead of dwelling upon isolated facts. Many philosophers have used similar words, and their opponents reply that such sayings are words and nothing more. To declare that this is the best or the worst of all possible worlds, as the impartial

cynic is accustomed to suggest against both sides, is in reality to declare the state of your own liver. Your universe is the other side of yourself, and to give a theory which shall be valid for every one is to claim omniscience. Emerson, at any rate, does not profess to argue; he simply asserts, and the assertion comes to this, that it is possible to take a cheerful view of things in general. That, at least, defines the point of view from which his writings may act as an inspiring source if not as revelations of fact. The essays in which he develops these doctrines most explicitly, the "Oversoul," "Compensation," "Circles," and the like, may be futile considered as philosophical dogmas; and there is not even a pretence of proving their truth. They may still be regarded as studies of the spirit in which a man may serenely front the trials of life and find comfort from forebodings. Emerson has been often compared to the great Stoic moralists, and, like them, he indulges in the hyperbolic and paradoxical. Macaulay in the essay upon Bacon, in which Emerson found the typical Lockist, suggests an "amusing fiction" illustrative of the contrast. Two travellers find a village full of small-pox. The Baconian traveller vaccinates the sufferers. The Stoic assures the villagers that to the wise man disease and the loss of friends is no evil. A



merchant has lost his ship. The Baconian makes a diving-bell and fishes up the cargo; while the Stoic exhorts him not to seek happiness in things outside himself. That is the difference, says Macaulay, between the "philosophy of words" and the "philosophy of works." When Baconians have suppressed disease and disaster, the Stoic will doubtless have less call for his consolations. While such things remain with us, some sort of moral discipline will have its uses; and if the Stoic paradoxes when taken literally are hard of acceptance by anybody who has had the toothache, they were exaggerations of principles which have formed noble characters and even had their utility in the world. The exhortations of Epictetus and Marcus Aurelius have really encouraged men who had not yet been provided with diving-bells and vaccination. The wise man of the Stoics is to become independent of chance and change by identifying himself with reason; and Emerson's disciple is to perceive that in all evils there is compensation when we look upon the world as the evolution of divine ideas. He may remind us of another philosopher whom he resembled in frugality, dignity, and cheerful acceptance of life. They coincide in one significant saying. "A free man," says Spinoza, in what has been called "one of the most weighty sayings ever uttered," "thinks

of death least of all things, and his wisdom is a meditation not of death but of life." So Emerson tells us that "a wise man in our time caused to be written on his tomb, 'Think on living.'" We are not to waste life in doubts and fears; and one great mark of progress is that the old system of meditating upon death and surrounding the thought with terrors has gone out of fashion. That is Emerson's answer by anticipation to the charge that he has not spoken sufficiently of the terror of death.

That you should train yourself to take evil bravely and cheerfully is a maxim more likely to be condemned as commonplace than as paradoxical. The statement becomes paradoxical when we deny the existence of evil, and immoral if it be understood as advice to ignore instead of facing the inevitable. Emerson certainly accepts some rather startling positions. The first lesson of history, he says, is "the good of evil": "Good is a good doctor, but Bad is sometimes a better!" and he illustrates the point by some remarkable cases. The contrast of good and evil is expressed in art, and explains its powers. "What would painter do, or what would poet or saint do but for the crucifixions and hells?" But for death, as Mr. Weller remarked, what would become of the undertakers? Emerson admires great men of all


classes—"scourges of God and failings of the human race." They are all parts of the general system:—

If plague or earthquake break not Heaven's design,  
Why, then, a Borgia or a Catiline?

The knaves, he calmly observes, win in every political struggle and a change of government means delivering society from the hands of one to the hands of another set of criminals, and the march of civilisation is "a train of felonies." Yet a "beneficent tendency" streams irresistibly through the centuries, even through evil agents. Once he knew a "burly Boniface" in a rural capital. This gentleman "introduced all the fiends into the town, and united in his own person the functions of bully, incendiary, bankrupt, and burglar, and yet he was the most public-spirited citizen." The "boss," as he would be called in modern language, was, at the same time, "a Man of Ross." The moral is that his energy was good, and only wanted to be directed to the better objects. Such illustrations of the "good of evil" are certainly rather startling, and may explain why Emerson has even been described as without a conscience. Emerson, like his mystic guides, has a tendency to what theologians call "antinomianism." The inner world is the whole real world,



and a morality which takes outer consequences for a criterion becomes merely prudential. Moral goodness for him implies the harmony of the individual soul. The man approaches perfection so far as the eyes of his spirit are always open to the inner light, and his whole nature acts spontaneously in conformity with the divine will. Obedience to the moral law is equivocal or worthless so far as it depends upon any extrinsic motive. If imposed from without, it so far rather savours of evil. Virtue, to be genuine, must be the absolutely spontaneous efflux of the character, not a mere disguise for hopes of reward and fear of punishment. Emerson insists upon this aspect of the truth, till even spontaneous wickedness seems to be better than compulsory goodness. Each man, he says, should "plant himself indomitably upon his instincts." A "valued adviser" warned him against trusting his instincts against venerable traditions. Your impulses, he said, may be from below, not from above. "Well," he replied, "If I am the devil's child, I will live, then, from the devil." No law, he adds, can be sacred to me but that of my nature. That is right which is according to my constitution, and that wrong which is against it. Emerson therefore accepts a thorough individualism. All associations impress limitation by others. Each man is



"cramped and diminished" by his associates. He distrusted even the movements encouraged by transcendentalism. "Professed philanthropists, it is strange and horrible to say, are an altogether odious set of people, whom one would shun as the worst of liars and canters." Temperance and anti-slavery, and so forth, are poor things when prosecuted for themselves as an end, though appealing to generous motives. The reason is that all associations must be a product of, not dependent upon, a bond. The "union is only perfect when all the unities are isolated." When each man sees the truth for himself, all will come together. Reform, therefore, even in the case of slavery, should proceed by the gradual elevation of the human spirit, not by direct legislation and outward agitation. When you trust to external means instead of acting upon the soul you become mechanical and take narrow and distorted views of the evil. The transcendentalists, so far as they accepted this view, were regarded as mere apostles of "culture." They were inclined to stand aside from active life, and leave things to be gradually improved by the slow infiltration of higher ideals. Emerson, says Lowell, was a truer follower of Goethe than Carlyle; his teaching tended to self-culture and the development of the individual man, till it seemed "almost Pythagorean in its

voluntary seclusion from commonwealth affairs." Emerson, in his lecture upon the transcendentalists, accepts and apologises for this tendency. They can afford to stand aside from the world where even good causes are spoilt by compromise and associated with vulgar motives. There is, he admits, a difficulty in keeping upon the higher levels of thought, in retaining the faith which reveals itself in intuition and ecstasy. Yet the world may find room for "some few persons of purer fire" to serve as "collectors of the heavenly spark, with power to convey the electricity to others." The thought which the hermit "strove to proclaim by silence" will spread till it has reorganised society.


If Emerson were to be treated as a system-maker, we might suggest that he is only accentuating one aspect of a single truth. Virtue certainly is not obedience to an outward law, but the spontaneous outcome of the man's nature. It implies not the less the nature which fits a man for social life. "Self-culture" does not imply retreat to a hermitage, for the most efficient culture is in the active discharge of duties. The simple truth requires to be limited by its correlatives. In any case, nothing could be really less chargeable against Emerson than an approach to ethical insensibility. It is precisely the keenness and

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delicacy of his moral sense which attracts us and gives point to his best sentences. He is not the man to retire to a palace of art or find in æsthetic indulgence an anodyne to dull his sympathies with human sorrow. He can indeed admire the teachers who, like Shakespeare and Montaigne, look upon morality with a certain impartiality. Shakespeare, he rather quaintly asserts, "is our city of refuge if we tire of the saints." But the critic ought to show the relation between Shakespeare and Swedenborg. Now Swedenborg's great merit is the "immolation of genius and fame at the shrine of conscience." The "atmosphere of moral sentiment opens to every wretch that has reason the doors of the universe," and "all men are commanded by the saint." If Emerson's optimism leads him to dwell upon the "good of evil," and to see the use of "scourges of God" and vulgar political scoundrels, it is because they are for him the instruments of an essentially moral force. He can condemn a vulgar exaltation over mechanical continuous railways and telegraphs; but, instead of simply denouncing them, like Ruskin, he sees their good side, and believes that in time they will become instruments of the world spirit. His "pantheism" is not belief in a power superior to or indifferent to morality, but one to which the true, the good, and the beautiful are


identical. We want something beyond Shakespeare and Goethe. "We, too, must write Bibles to unite again the heavenly and the earthly worlds." The teacher who is to come will see into the ultimate laws; "see the identity of the law of gravitation with purity of heart," and show that "duty is one thing with science, with beauty, and with joy."

This, no doubt, verges upon the poetical; it is hard of acceptance for the poor "Lockist," and can be fully appreciated only by those who have access to the "ecstatic state." Others must be content to take a lower point of view. The title of one of Emerson's books—*The Conduct of Life*—defines one less inaccessible aspect of his teaching. If he has not penetrated the secret of the universe, he can show by example what attitude and disposition of mind can make the universe tolerable. It may be suggested to the pessimist that as he cannot understand the general system of things, and certainly cannot alter it, he may as well learn how to make the best of it. Emerson may supply useful hints for such an enterprise. "The true preacher," he says, can "be known by this, that he deals out to the people his life." The phrase may explain his own secret. He had, for one thing, to depend upon popular lecturing, a trade which, it must be granted, has its drawbacks. He



had, he complained, to go about "peddling with his literary pack of notions," dropping pearls before superficial hearers, who would turn them into twaddle and extravagance. Still, he took his mission simply and seriously, gave what he had, and tried to indicate "the ideal and holy life," . . . to "celebrate the spiritual powers," in contrast to the mechanical philosophy of the time, and "appeal to the great optimism self-affirmed in all bosoms." His simplicity and sincerity moved congenial hearers to aspire to regions of thought higher than those of the counting-house or the market, and impressed upon them at least the beauty and dignity of Emerson's own character. His aphorism—it has, I fear, a twang of the popular lecturer about it—"Hitch your wagon to a star" sums up the moral, and the power depends as much upon the sweetness of disposition as upon the mystical doctrine. The charm appears in his best poetry, in spite of its admitted shortcomings. His characteristic want of continuity made him as incapable of evolving a central idea as of expounding an argument. As in prose, he often coins exquisite phrases, but he is abrupt and fragmentary and apt to break down both in grammar and rhythm. A true inspiration comes as it came to Blake in the midst of much incoherence and stammering utterance. Few poems

are more touching than the *Dirge* and the *Threnody*, in which he commemorates his brothers and the son who died in infancy. The *Threnody* recalls Wordsworth in the simplicity and in the concluding meditation, where he finds soothing if not fully consoling thought. What orthodox critics may say of it I know not, but, at any rate, few poems bring one into so close a contact with a perfectly sweet nature, or could show how a great sorrow should be met by a man equally brave and tender. In the essay upon "Experience"—on which, it must be confessed, it is not easy to put any clear interpretation—he refers again to the loss of his son. "Grief," he says, "makes us idealists. The world becomes a dream. Life is a train of moods"; the moods "are many-coloured lenses which paint the world their own hue." And yet the dream is somehow the reality. The facts, as he has learned from Swedenborg, are only symbols. Life wears "a visionary face." It is hard, he admits, to keep ourselves at this mystical point of view. The poet who is to show us the truth under the outside world has not yet come. The prosaic person will refuse a consolation which proposes, according to him, to drop substantial facts for dreams and shadows. Yet he may allow that the emotion is in itself beautiful. If he cannot accept the optimist view of the world,



he can, perhaps, learn from the optimist how to take the inevitable cheerfully. Emerson admits in one essay that Fate is a reality and has a very ugly side to it. Yet he ends by exhorting us to "build altars to the beautiful necessity"; and, without bothering ourselves with metaphysical puzzles, to find comfort in the thought that "all is made of one piece," and that the Law which we dread is really "Intelligence," which vivifies nature, and somehow makes Fate identical with Freedom. This is not remarkable for lucidity, and to the prosaic reasoner may seem to amount to the statement that a man of fine moral nature may protect himself against harsh truth by cultivating pleasant illusions. Yet it shows how, without yielding to illusions, such a man can make his life beautiful. The secret is indicated in the beautiful essays upon "Love" and "Friendship." In speaking of friendship, Emerson becomes a little too high-flown, because he is suspicious of even cementing friendship by actual services. The Stoics held that friendship was only possible for the wise man; and Emerson thinks that it requires such "rare and costly" natures that it can seldom be realised. It is the product of the spontaneous affinity of the soul, which must be independent of all external circumstance or reciprocity of kind actions. In the essay where he



manages to give a new charm even to the ancient topic of "Love" he puts a more acceptable theory. He speaks in a prose-poem, which reminds us of Mr. Meredith's *Love in a Valley*, of the recollection "of the days when happiness was not happy enough, but must be drugged with the rubbish of pain and fear; for he touched the secret of the writer who said of love—

All other pleasures are not worth its pains;  
and when the day was not enough, but the night,  
too, must be consumed in keen recollections; when  
the head boiled all night on the pillow with the  
generous deed it resolved on; when the moonlight  
was a pleasing fever, and the stars were letters  
and the flowers ciphers, and the air was carved into  
song; when all business seemed an impertinence,  
and all the men and women running to and fro in  
the streets mere pictures." Love may generate  
illusions; but it makes the strong gentle and gives  
the coward heart. The lover becomes a "new  
man, with new perceptions, new and keener pur-  
poses, and a religious solemnity of character and  
aims." And thus love, which is "the deification  
of persons, becomes more impersonal every day";  
and the passion of Romeo for Juliet "puts us in  
training for a love which knows not sex nor person  
nor partiality, but which seeks virtue and wisdom  
to the end of increasing virtue and wisdom."



I do Emerson injustice in taking a few sentences out of his fine rapture; and it would be out of place to consider the cold-blooded criticism that a Romeo sometimes fails to develop in this desirable fashion. I only refer to it to indicate the process by which, as I think, the prosaic person may get some profit even from Emerson's mysticism. It may be unintelligible or false if taken as a solid philosophy. It reveals, at any rate, the man himself, the pure, simple-minded, high-feeling man, made of the finest clay of human nature; the one man who to Carlyle uttered a genuine human voice, and soothed the profound glooms of dyspeptic misanthropy; a little too apt, no doubt, to fall into the illusion of taking the world to be as comfortably constituted as himself; and apt also to withdraw from the ugly drama in which the graver passions are inextricably mixed up with the heroic and the rational, to the remote mountain-tops of mystical reflection. Yet nobody could be more fitted to communicate the "electric shock" to his disciples, because of his keen perception of the noble elements of life, in superiority to all the vulgar motives and modes of thought, which were not the less attractive because he could not see his way to any harmonious or consistent system of thought.

## Anthony Trollope

LONG ago, when Trollope was becoming known as the historian of Barsetshire, I was one of his devoted readers. Some time later I happened to find myself alone at an inn where the literature consisted of waifs and strays from the Tauchnitz reprints. Among them was one of Trollope's novels, and I rejoiced at the prospect of a pleasant evening. To my grievous disappointment I suddenly broke down. My old favourite had lost all charms. The book was as insipid as yesterday's newspaper. Of course I explained the phenomenon by my own improvement in good taste, and for a long time I held complacently that Trollope should be left to the vulgar herd. Lately I have begun to doubt this plausible explanation. An excellent critic of Victorian novels (Mr. Herbert Paul) told us, it is true, the other day that Trollope was not only dead, but dead beyond all hopes of resurrection. There are symptoms, however, which may point rather to a case of suspended vitality. Mr. Frederic Harrison, in a very appreciative article upon Trollope, regards his temporary obscurity as illustrating an ordinary

phenomenon. As literary fashions change, the rising generation throws aside too contemptuously the books which pleased its immediate predecessors, and which will again interest its successors. Trollope, he thinks, may have for our children the interest at least of a singularly faithful portrait of the society of fifty years ago. Such of our unfortunate descendants as have a historical turn will be overwhelmed by the masses of material provided for them; and no doubt it will be a relief to them when weary of official despatches and blue-books, and solemn historical dissertations, to clothe the statistical skeleton in the concrete flesh and blood of realistic fiction. They may learn what the British squire or archdeacon of the period looked like, besides ascertaining the amount of his income and his constitutional position. In course of such reading, they may discover that such personages, if taken in the right spirit, are really attractive. Nobody can claim for Trollope any of the first-rate qualities which strain the powers of subtle and philosophical criticism; but perhaps it would be well if readers would sometimes make a little effort to blunt their critical faculty. May not an author beg to be judged by his peers? "I know that I am stupid and commonplace," I am often disposed to say; "but if you would condescend to be a little

less clever for once, you might still find something in me." Nobody will listen to such an appeal; and yet if we could learn the art of enjoying dull books, it is startling to think what vast fields of innocent enjoyment would be thrown open to us. Macaulay, we are told, found pleasure in reading and rereading the most vapid and rubbishy novels. Trollope's novels are far above that level; and though the rising generation is so brilliant that it can hardly enjoy them without a certain condescension, the condescension might be repaid.

If any one is disposed to cultivate the frame of mind appropriate for Trollope he should begin by reading the *Autobiography*. That will put his mind in the proper key. Trollope indeed gives fair notice that he does not mean to give us a "record of his inner life." He is not about to turn himself inside out in the manner of Rousseau. He must, no doubt, like all of us, have had an "inner life," though one can hardly suppose that it presented any of the strange phenomena which delight the student of morbid psychology. He professes to tell us only such facts as might have been seen by an outside observer. He tells us, however, enough to suggest matter for speculation to persons interested in education. Nobody ever met the adult Trollope in the flesh without

receiving one impression. Henry VIII., we are told—and it is one of the few statements which make that monarch attractive—“loved a man.” If so, he would clearly have loved Trollope. In person, Trollope resembled the ideal beefeater: square and sturdy, and as downright as a box on the ear. The simple, masculine character revealed itself in every lineament and gesture. His talk was as hearty and boisterous as a gust of a north-easter—a Kingsley north-easter, that is; not blighting, but bracing and genial. The first time I met him was in a low room, where he was talking with a friend almost as square and sturdy as himself. It seemed as if the roof was in danger of being blown off by the vigour of the conversational blasts. And yet, if I remember rightly, they were not disputing, but simply competing in the utterance of a perfectly harmless sentiment in which they cordially agreed. A talker of feeble lungs might be unable to get his fair share in the discussion, but not because Trollope was intentionally overbearing, or even rough. His kindness and cordiality were as unmistakable as his sincerity; and if he happened to impinge upon his hearer's sore points, it was from clumsiness, not malignity. He was incapable of shyness or diffidence, and would go at any subject as gallantly as he rode at a stiff fence in the hunting-

field. His audacity sprang not from conceit, but from a little over-confidence in the power of downright common-sense.

Here is the problem to which I referred. If we inquired how such a character had been developed, the last hypothesis which we should make would be that it was due to such surroundings as are described in the *Autobiography*. If one wished to bring up a lad to be a sneak, a cynic, and a humbug, one would deal with him as Trollope was dealt with in his childhood. Many distinguished men have preserved painful impressions of their schooldays. Thackeray has sufficiently indicated what he thought of the morality of a public school in his day. Dickens felt bitterly to the end of his life the neglect from which he suffered during part of his childhood. Trollope had a more painful and prolonged experience than either. His father was a man of such oddity and perversity that it must have required all the son's filial duty in later years not to introduce him in a novel. He would have been more interesting as a model than the gentleman who stood for Micawber, though certainly without Micawber's peculiar claims to be attractive. He was a man of ability and learning, who had ruined good prospects at the Bar by a singular facility for quarrelling with his bread and butter. By

way of retrieving his position, he had taken to farming, of which he was absolutely ignorant; and when he got into the inevitable difficulties, he set about compiling a gigantic *Encyclopædia Ecclesiastica*, for which he was equally incompetent, and which would have ruined a publisher had any such person been forthcoming. He was most anxious, his son assures us, to do his duty to his family, but equally misguided in his plans for their welfare. Anthony's chief recollections at least were of standing in a convenient position while his amiable parent was shaving, so that his hair might be pulled at any slip in Latin grammar, and of being knocked down for stupidity by a folio Bible. It was all meant in kindness, but only produced obstinate idleness. The child was sent as a day boy to Harrow, where the headmaster could only express his horror that so dirty a little wretch should belong to the school; and his comrades unanimously excluded him from their society. Then he was sent to a private school, where the master treated him as a degraded being for faults committed by others, and had not the manliness to confess when he discovered his mistake. His next experience was at Winchester, where his elder brother thrashed him daily with a thick stick. Being big, awkward, ugly, ill-dressed, and dirty, he was generally despised and "suffered horribly."



Then he returned to Harrow, and was at the same time employed occasionally as a labourer on his father's farm. He was universally despised, excluded from all games, and, though he "gravitated upwards" to near the top of the school, by force of seniority, represented at the age of nineteen the densest ignorance of his lessons attainable even by a boy at an English public school. The one pleasant thing that he could remember was that he once turned against an oppressor. The bully was so well thrashed that he had to be sent home for repairs.

The spirit in which Trollope took this cruelty is characteristic. Less painful experience of the life at a public school helped to convince Cowper that human nature was radically corrupt, and Shelley that the existence of a merciful Providence was doubtful, and Thackeray that there was something radically wrong in the social order. Trollope, who hated tyranny as earnestly as any one seems only to have drawn the modest inference that the discipline at Winchester and Harrow was imperfect; and, for the time, he did not even go so far. He was always, as he says, "craving for love," even for the love of the young bullies who made his life a burthen. He was miserable in his schooldays, because he "envied the popularity of popular boys." They lived in a social

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paradise from which he was excluded. But he apparently did not think that his exclusion was wrong. It was simply natural—part of the inevitable and providential order of nature. He accepted the code under which he suffered as if it had been the obvious embodiment of right reason. It was quite proper that poverty and clumsiness should be despised and bullied; that was implied in the essential idea of a public school, and his comrades naturally treated him as a herd of wild animals may trample upon an intruder of an inferior species. It "was their nature to," and there was no more to be said about it. It is pathetic to observe the average child accepting its misery as part of a sacred tradition; but in Trollope's case it had one advantage: he bore no malice to anybody. The brother who had thrashed him every day became, as he testifies, the best of brothers, and Trollope cherished no resentment against individuals or to the system. The toughness looked like stupidity, but, at any rate, was an admirable preservative against the temptations, to which a more sensitive and reflective nature would have been liable, of revolting against morality in general or meeting tyranny by hypocrisy and trickery.

His start in life was equally unpromising. As he knew no languages, ancient or modern, he

became classical usher at a school in Brussels, with the promise of a commission in the Austrian army. Then he was suddenly transferred to a clerkship in the London Post Office. He was disqualified for the new position by general ignorance and special incapacity for the simplest arithmetic. A vague threat that he must pass an examination was forgotten before it was put in execution, and Trollope characteristically takes occasion to denounce the system of competitive examination by which he would have been excluded. Meanwhile he was turned loose in London, and attempted to live like a gentleman on £90 a year. The results are indicated by a couple of anecdotes. A money-lender once advanced him £4, for which, first and last, he paid £200. This person, he says, became so much attached to him as to pay a daily visit at his office and exhort him to be punctual. "These visits were very terrible, and can hardly have been of service to me in the office." This mild remark applies also to the visits from the mother of a young woman in the country who had fallen in love with him, and to whom he "lacked the pluck to give a decided negative." The mother used to appear with a basket on her arm and an immense bonnet upon her head, and inquire in a loud voice, before all his companions, "Anthony Trollope,

when are you going to marry my daughter?" No wonder that he was miserable; he was hopelessly in debt, and often unable to pay for a dinner; he hated his work, he says, and he hated his idleness; he quarrelled with his superiors, who thought him hopelessly incapable, and felt that he was sinking "to the lowest pits." At last he heard of a place in the Irish Post Office, which everybody despised, and was successful on applying for it, because his masters were so glad to get rid of him. At the same time they informed his new superior that he would probably have to be dismissed at the first opportunity.

If the *Autobiography* had been a novel, instead of a true story, the continuation must have been pronounced utterly improbable. No sooner does Trollope get to Ireland than the story changes; he sets his hand to the plough and wins the respect of his superiors; he at once begins hunting, and, though very heavy and very blind and "not a good horseman," rides straight and boldly and steadily for the next thirty years, letting neither official nor literary duties interfere; he makes a happy marriage at an early period; he rides up and down over Ireland and England setting things straight; and is sent on missions to Egypt and the West Indies and the United States and Australia and turns out his daily tale of

copy at home or abroad, travelling or resting, and rises in his office, and withstands Sir Rowland Hill, and has "delicious feuds" with his colleagues; and retires with a sense that he has both done his duty and thoroughly enjoyed his life. Of all this, which may be read in the *Autobiography*, nothing more need be said, or it needs only to be said that so prosperous a consummation was never tacked to so dismal a beginning. It seems to suggest the immoral inference that we need take no thought for our sons' education. The innate good qualities will come out and the superficial stupidity is only a safeguard against over-sensibility; the wasted and unhappy youth and boyhood may be the stepping-stone to a thoroughly honourable and prosperous career. I am here only concerned with the light which the story may throw upon the novel-writing. Trollope himself dwells chiefly upon that subject and sets forth his views with the most engaging candour and simplicity. He propounds some theories which may scandalise the author who takes a lofty view of his vocation; but they are worth notice, if only because they are more frequently adopted than avowed by his rivals.

It seems, in the first place, that in one respect his early life had been propitious in spite of all probability. His mother had supplied the one

bright influence. One of his father's most preposterous schemes had turned out well by sheer accident. He had sent his wife, Heaven knows why, to open a bazaar in Cincinnati. She was to make a fortune by selling pin-cushions and pepper-boxes to the natives of that remote region, whom he must apparently have supposed to be in the state of savages ready to barter valuables for beads. The Yankee was not quite so innocent. She, of course, lost all her money, but came home to describe the "domestic manners" of her customers with a sharpness which for a time set England and America by the ears. She discovered that she had a pure vein of rather vulgar satire, and worked it to such effect that, though she was over fifty when she began to write, she published one hundred and fourteen volumes before her death. She managed to keep her family afloat, and Trollope, in his darkest days, saw that one possible road to success lay in following her footsteps. He perceived that he had not genius to be a poet, nor the erudition necessary for a historian. But he had a certain taste for reading. He had, even in his boyhood, indulged during the intervals of bullying in occasional rambles through such literature as came in his way, and had decided that *Pride and Prejudice* was the best novel in the language. At the Post

Office he had learned French and brushed up his Latin sufficiently to enjoy Horace. Then he had been given to what he calls the "dangerous mental practice" of castle-building. He solaced his loneliness by carrying on imaginary stories, of which he was himself the hero, and which he characteristically kept within the limits of possibility. He could not fancy himself handsome, or a philosopher, by any stretch of mind, but he could imagine himself to be clever and chivalrous enough to be attractive to beautiful women. This suggested that in his mind, as in his mother's, there was a mine of literary material, and he resolved that novel-writing was the one career open to him. Accordingly he set to work in a thoroughly business-like spirit, and slowly and doggedly forced himself upon publishers.


"Nobody but a fool," says the great Johnson, "ever wrote except for money." Trollope holds at least that the love of money is a perfectly honourable and sufficient reason for writing. "We know," he says, "that the more a man earns the more useful he is to his fellow-men"—a fine sweeping maxim, which certainly has its convenience. It is true, he declares, of lawyers and doctors, and would be true of clergymen if (which is a rather large assumption) the best men were always made bishops. It is equally true of au-

thors. Shakespeare wrote for money, and Byron, Scott, Tennyson, Dickens, Macaulay, and Carlyle were not above being paid. "Take away from English authors their copyrights, and you would very soon take away from England her authors." He wrote, therefore, as he avows, for the very same reasons which prompt the barrister to go to the Bar, or the baker to set up his oven. I have certain qualms about the theory of copyright—though I do not mention them to my publishers. It is not that I would deprive authors of their reward. In the ideal state of things, I fancy, the promising author will be infallibly recognised by the scientific critic; a parental government will pay him a handsome salary and trust to his honour to do his best and take his time; and his works, if any, will then be circulated gratis. That scheme would avoid the objection which occurs to Trollope's theory. We can hardly assume that the author's usefulness to his fellow-creatures is precisely proportioned to his earnings. On the contrary, the great evil of to-day is that an author has constantly to choose whether he will do the best, or whether he will do the most profitable work in his power. Tennyson and Carlyle, to take Trollope's examples, would never have reached their excellence had they not dared to be poor till middle age. Had they accepted



Trollope's maxim, we should have had masses of newspaper articles and keepsake rhyming instead of *Sartor Resartus* and *In Memoriam*.


The temptation of the present system to sacrifice quality to quantity, and to work exhausted brains instead of accumulating thought, is too obvious to be insisted upon. When we look at Trollope's turnout, we are tempted to take him for an example of the consequences. George Eliot, as Mr. Harrison tells us—and we can well believe it—was horror-struck when she heard of Trollope's methods. When he began a new book, he allowed a fixed time for its completion, and day by day entered in a diary the number of pages written. A page meant two hundred and fifty words. He had every word counted, and never failed to deliver his tale of words at the time prefixed. "Such appliances," people told him, "were beneath the notice of a man of genius." He never fancied himself, he replied, to be a man of genius, but "had I been so, I think I might well have subjected myself to these trammels." He could hardly "repress his scorn" when he was told that an imaginative writer should wait for "inspiration." The tallow candle, he declares, might as well wait "for the divine moment of melting." Nay, he recommends youthful aspirants to "avoid enthusiastic rushes with their pen." They should



sit down at their desks like lawyers' clerks and work till their tasks are done. Then they may rival Trollope, at any rate in quantity. During a period of twelve years (1859 to 1871) he did his official duties so as to leave no pretext for fault finding; he hunted twice a week, he played whist daily, went freely into society, took his holidays, and yet turned out more work, including articles of all kinds in periodicals, than any contemporary author. He was up every morning at 5.30; spent half an hour in reading the previous day's work; and then wrote two hundred and fifty words every quarter of an hour for two hours and a half. He wrote when he was travelling on a railway, or on shipboard, and in the course of his career turned out some fifty novels, besides other work, including a *Life of Cicero*, which showed at least his daring. He lamented, I remember, at one time that Mrs. Gore (who wrote seventy novels and two hundred volumes) was still ahead of him; but perhaps, counting all his writing, he had equalled her before his death.

It would be absurd to argue gravely against Trollope's simple-minded views; to appeal to the demigods of literature who have thought, like George Eliot, that there was a difference between "tallow chandling" and bookwriting, and that, if inspiration be a daring word, some time must

at least be allowed for ideas to ripen and harmonise, and that it may be well to await some overmastering mood that will not come regularly when an old groom calls you at 5.30 A.M. It is more to the purpose to admit frankly that some great writers have been almost equally productive. Scott took almost as business-like a view as Trollope. Lockhart tells us how an idle youth was irritated by the shadow of a hand behind a window-blind, and by noting the provoking pertinacity with which it added sheet to sheet with the regularity of a copying machine, and how it afterwards appeared that the sheets were those of *Waverley*. Scott, it may be replied, was only pouring out the stores of imagery which had been accumulating for many years, when as yet he had no thought of bringing them to market. Moreover, in some twelve years of excessive production, even Scott's vein was pretty nearly exhausted. What stores, one may ask, had Trollope to draw upon? The answer suggests that Trollope was not quite so black as he painted himself. When he comes to lay down rules for the art—or trade—he shows that three hours a day did not include the whole of his labours. A novelist, he declares, must write "because he has a story to tell, not because he has to tell a story." To do so, he must "live with his characters."



They must be with him when he wakes and when he lies down to sleep. He must know them as he knows his best friends. Trollope says that he knew the actors in his own stories—"the tone of the voice, the colour of the hair, every flame of the eye, and the very clothes they wear." He knew precisely what each of them would say on any given occasion. He declares, in answer to the complaint of over-rapidity, that he wrote best when he wrote quickest. That was, he says, when he was away from hunting and whist, in "some quiet spot among the mountains" where he could be absorbed among his characters. "I have wandered about among the rocks and woods, crying at their grief, laughing at their absurdities, and thoroughly enjoying their joy. I have been impregnated with my own creations till it has been my only excitement to sit with my pen in my hand and drive them before me at as quick a pace as I could make them travel."

This surely is sound doctrine; but Trollope is justifying one set of critics in order to answer another. He wrote best, he admits, when his mind was fullest, and freest from distraction; that is, when he had the "inspiration" or "rush of enthusiasm," against which he warns his disciples. No doubt a man may write quickly at such moments. The great Goethe—if one may intro-

duce such an august example—tells us that he was at times so eager to get his thoughts upon paper that he could not even wait to put the sheet straight, and dashed down his verses diagonally. George Eliot—to come a bit nearer to Trollope—wrote her finest part of *Adam Bede* without a pause or a correction. That you should write quickly when you are “inspired” is natural; but that does not prove that all previous inspiration is superfluous. These unconscious admissions must qualify the statement about the two hundred and fifty words every quarter of an hour. Trollope’s genuine gift showed itself in that practice of “castle building” which, as he tells us, he always kept up. His ideal architecture, it is true, was of a humble and prosaic kind. He did not venture into regions of old romance; nor discover ideal excellence in Utopias of the future; or even observe that the most commonplace houses may be the background for great passions or tragedies. He always kept, as he says, to the probable. His imaginary world was conterminous with that in which he lived. As he tramped along the highroad he saw wayside cottages or vicarages, or perhaps convenient hunting-boxes, and provided them with a charming girl to flirt with, and one or two good fellows for after-dinner talk; and made himself an ideal home such as



might be provided by the most ordinary course of events. This meant such day-dreaming as just repeats the events of the day—only supplying the touch of simple sentimentalism. A good many men of business, I fancy, are sentimentalists in secret, and after a day of stockbroking or law conveyancing enjoy in strict privacy a little whimpering over a novel. Trollope had abundant tenderness of nature and his sentimentalism is perfectly genuine, though he did find it convenient to bring it to market. That was a main source of his popularity. There were—as the public held—such nice girls in his stories. Once, he tells us, he tried to write a novel without love. He took for his heroine an unattractive old maid in money difficulties; but he had to wind up by allowing her to make a romantic marriage. It is this quaint contrast between the burly, vigorous man of the world and the author's young ladies, who provide him with such sentiment as he can appreciate, that somehow attracts us even by force of commonplace.

Trollope claims another merit—not to the modern taste. "I have ever thought of myself," he says, "as a preacher of sermons, and my pulpit as one which I could make both salutary and agreeable to my audience." Young people, he thinks, receive a large part of their education

from novels, and a good novelist should inculcate sound morality. Beatrix Esmond, for example, with her beauty and heartlessness, might seem to be a dangerous example to set before girls. But as she is so treated that every girl will pray to be unlike her, and every youth to avoid the wiles of which she was a mistress, a sermon is preached which no clergyman could rival. Let us hope so—though I must confess to a weakness both for Beatrix and Becky Sharp which may imply some injury to my morals. One point, at least, may be granted. "I do believe," says Trollope, "that no girl has risen from the reading of my pages less modest than she was before, and that some may have learnt from them that modesty is a charm worth possessing." The phrase reminds me of my favourite critic, who declared that there was not a word in Dr. Watts's sermons "which could call a blush to the cheek of modesty." Trollope certainly deserves that negative but by no means worthless praise. When a novelist courts popularity by appealing to a perverted taste for the morally repulsive, I consider him to be a blackguard—even though he may be an "artist"; and, at the day of judgment, he will hardly, I suppose, be divided into two.

Trollope's moral purpose, however, led him into difficulty. The "regions of absolute evil," he

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says, "are foul and odious"; but there is a "borderland," where flowers are mixed with weeds and where the novelist is tempted to enter. The "border-land," one would rather say, is continuous with the world; and the novelist who will not speak of it will have to abandon any dealings with human nature. Trollope was confined within narrow limits. One of his novels was refused by a religious periodical because it spoke of dancing without reprobation. A dignitary of the Church of England remonstrated with him because one of his heroines was tempted to leave her husband for a lover. Trollope replied forcibly enough by asking him whether he ever denounced adultery from his pulpit. If so, why should not the same denunciation be uttered from the pulpit of the novelist? The dignitary judiciously invited him to spend a week in the country and talk over the subject. The visit never came off, and, if that dignitary be now alive, he probably looks back with some regret to the Trollope standard. In one novel Trollope ventured upon a bolder step, and described the career of a female outcast, but the difficulty imposed a good many limitations. If a novelist is to be a preacher, he cannot simply overlook what he ought to denounce. Trollope was, in principle, a thorough "realist," but he had to write in popular magazines and submit



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to their conventions. It may be a difficult question whether a "realistic" description of vice makes vice more disgusting or stimulates a morbid interest. Trollope, at any rate, was in the awkward position of a realist bound to ignore realities. He had to leave gaps in his pictures of life, and gaps—according to some tastes—in the only really interesting places.

We can see plainly enough what we must renounce in order to enjoy Trollope. We must cease to bother ourselves about art. We must not ask for exquisite polish of style. We must be content with good homespun phrases which give up all their meaning on the first reading. We must not desire brilliant epigrams suggesting familiarity with æsthetic doctrines or theories of the universe. A brilliant modern novelist is not only clever, but writes for clever readers. He expects us to understand oblique references to esoteric theories, and to grasp a situation from a delicate hint. We are not to be bothered with matter-of-fact details, but to have facts sufficiently adumbrated to enable us to accept the æsthetic impression. Trollope writes like a thorough man of business or a lawyer stating a case. We must know exactly the birth, parentage, and circumstances of all the people concerned, and have a precise statement of what afterwards happens to everybody mentioned in the

course of the story. We must not care for artistic unity. Trollope admits that he could never construct an intricate plot to be gradually unravelled. That, in fact, takes time and thought. He got hold of some leading incident, set his characters to work, and followed out any series of events which happened to be involved. In one of his stories, if I remember rightly, the love affairs of four different couples get mixed up, and each of them has to be followed out to a conclusion. He simply looks on, and only takes care to make his report consistent and intelligible. To accept such writing in the corresponding spirit implies, no doubt, the confession that you are a bit of a Philistine, able to put up with the plainest of bread and butter and dispense with all the finer literary essences. I think, however, that at times one's state is the more gracious for accepting the position. There is something so friendly and simple and shrewd about one's temporary guide that one is the better for taking a stroll with him and listening to gossiping family stories, even though they be rather rambling and never scandalous. One difficulty is suggested, indeed, by Trollope's sacrifice of all other aims to the duty of fidelity. We begin to ask whether it can be worth while to read a novel which is a mere reflection of the commonplace. Would it not be better to

read genuine biographies and narratives of real events? One answer might be suggested by Walpole's famous remark about history, which, as he said, must be false. When we read the lives of people we have known and observe the singular transformations which take place, we are sometimes tempted to think that biography is an organised attempt to misrepresent the past. Trollope is at least conscientiously labouring to avoid that error with a zeal which few Boswells can rival. His fiction is in that respect even truer than history. Hawthorne said at an early period that Trollope's novels precisely suited his taste. They are "solid, substantial, written on the strength of beef and through the inspiration of ale, and just as real as if some giant had hewn a great lump out of the earth and put it under a glass case, with all its inhabitants going about their daily business, and not suspecting that they were being made a show of." Trollope was delighted, as he well might be, with such praise from so different a writer, and declares that this passage defined the aim of his novels "with wonderful accuracy." They represent, that is, the average English society of the time more faithfully even than memoirs of real persons, because there is no motive for colouring the motives of an imaginary person.

Is this really the case? Will our descendants



get an accurate conception of England in the middle of the nineteenth century? Or if some "medium" could call us up for cross-examination, should we have to warn posterity not to trust too implicitly to the portraiture? Trollope's best achievement, I take it, was the series of Barsetshire novels. They certainly passed at the time for a marvel of fidelity. Trollope tells us that he was often asked when he had lived in a cathedral close and become intimate with archdeacons; and had been able to answer that he had never lived in a close and had never spoken to an archdeacon. He had evolved the character, he declares, "out of his moral consciousness," and is pleasantly complacent over his creation. Though one would not like to disparage the merits of the performance, the wonder seems to be pretty simple. Trollope had been to Harrow and Winchester; the headmaster of one had become a dean, and the headmaster of the other a bishop. He afterwards spent two years riding through English country, and a visit, during this period, to Salisbury close had suggested the first Barchester novel. It is not wonderful that, after such experience, he should have been equal to the costume of archdeacons; and, apart from their costumes, archdeacons are not essentially different, I fancy, from bishops or headmasters, or from the average

adult male of the upper classes. Archdeacon Grantly is certainly an excellent and lifelike person; an honourable, narrow-minded English gentleman with just the necessary tinge of ecclesiastical dignity. Still, if our hypothetical descendants asked us, Were English archdeacons like that? we should be a little puzzled. If Miss Yonge could be called as a witness to character, she would certainly remonstrate. Archdeacons, she would say, in her time, high-church archdeacons at least, were generally saints. They could be spiritual guides; they had listened to Newman or been misled by *Essays and Reviews*; but they had, at least, been interested in the religious movements of the day. Trollope's archdeacon is as indifferent to all such matters as were the much-reviled dignitaries of an older generation. He is supposed to do his official duties, and he carefully says, "Good Heavens!" where a layman would use another phrase; but he never gives the slightest indication of having any religious views whatever beyond a dislike to dissenters. He has a landed estate, and is as zealous as any squire to keep up the breed of foxes, and he threatens to disinherit his son for making an unworldly marriage as if he were the great Barchester magnate—the Duke of Omnium himself.

I do not presume to inquire how far such a man

represents the prevalent type more accurately than the more ethereal divine of pious lady novelists. The Trollope theory of the archdeacons might be held to confirm Matthew Arnold's description of the Church as an "appendage of the barbarian"; and the philosophical historian might infer that in the nineteenth century the normal country parson was a very slightly modified squire. Perhaps Trollope's view may be a useful corrective to the study of the ordinary lives in which the saintliness of respectable clergymen tends to be a little over-emphasised; still, it omits or attenuates one element—the religious, namely—which must have had some importance in the character of contemporary divines. And what can we say for the young women who charmed his readers so thoroughly? Vulgar satire in those days was denouncing the "girl of the period"—the young lady who was chafing against established conventions of all kinds. The young women of *Barchester* seem to have been entirely innocent of such extravagance. Trollope's heroines are as domestic as *Clarissa Harlowe*. They have not a thought beyond housekeeping or making a respectable marriage. We could hardly expect such delineations of the fair feminine qualities as could be given by feminine novelists alone. We could not ask him for a *Jane Eyre* or still less for a

Maggie Tulliver. But were the average girls of forty years back made of such very solid flesh and blood with so small an allowance of the romantic? His are so good-natured, sensible, and common-place that he has the greatest difficulty in preventing them from at once marrying their lovers. He has to make them excessively punctilious on some point of their little code of propriety. One is loved by a lord, whose mother objects to a *mésalliance*; another is of doubtful legitimacy, and a third is the daughter of an excellent man whose character is for a moment under a cloud. They have to hold out till their lovers and their lovers' families have got over such scruples, or the cause has been removed. The most popular of all was Miss Lily Dale, whom Trollope himself unkindly describes as somewhat of a feminine prig. She will not marry the man whom she loves because she has been cruelly jilted by a thorough snob, and makes it a point of honour not to accept consolation or admit that she can love twice. Readers, it seems, fell in love with her, and used to write to Trollope entreating him to reconcile her to making her lover happy. Posterity, I think, will make a mistake if it infers that English girls were generally of this type; but it must admit, though with a certain wonder, that the type commended itself to a sturdy, sensible Briton of the period, as the


very ideal of womanhood, and delighted a large circle of readers.

The prosaic person, it must remember, has a faculty for ignoring all the elements of life and character which are not prosaic, and if Trollope's picture is accurate it is not exhaustive. The weakness comes from misapplying a good principle. Trollope made it a first principle to keep rigorously to the realities of life. He inferred that nothing strange or improbable should ever be admitted. That is not the way to be lifelike. Life, as we all find out, is full of the strange and improbable. Every character has its idiosyncrasies: its points of divergence from the ordinary. If the average man whose qualities are just at the mean between the extremes, who is half-way between genius and idiot, villain and saint, must be allowed to exist, it may be doubted whether he is not, on the whole, more exceptional than the so-called exceptions. Trollope inclines to make everybody an average specimen, and in his desire to avoid exaggeration inevitably exaggerates the commonplaceness of life. He is afraid of admitting any one into his world who will startle us by exhibiting any strength of character. His lovers, for example, have to win the heroine by showing superiority to the worldly scruples of their relations. The archdeacon's son proposes to marry a



beautiful and specially virtuous and clever girl, although her father had been accused of stealing. He thus endangers his prospects of inheriting an estate, though he had, in any case, enough to live upon. Surely some men would be up to such heroism, even though the girl herself hesitates to accept the sacrifice. But, to make things probable, we are carefully told that the hero has great difficulty in rising to the occasion; he has to be screwed up to the effort by the advice of a sensible lady; and even her encouragement would scarcely carry the point, had not the father's guilt been disproved. In this, and other cases, the heroes have all the vigour taken out of them that they may not shock us by diverging from the most commonplace standard. When a hero does something energetic, gives a thrashing, for example, to the man who has jilted a girl, we are carefully informed that he does it in a blundering and unsatisfactory way.

By the excision of all that is energetic, or eccentric, or impulsive, or romantic, you do not really become more lifelike; you only limit yourself to the common and uninteresting. That misconception injures Trollope's work, and accounts, I suspect, for the decline of our interest. An artist who systematically excludes all lurid colours or strong lights shows a dingy, whity-brown



universe, and is not therefore more true to nature. Barsetshire surely has its heroes and its villains, its tragedy and its force, as well as its archdeacons and young ladies bound hand and foot by the narrowest rules of contemporary propriety. Yet, after all, Trollope's desire to be faithful had its good result in spite of this misconception. There are, in the first place, a good many commonplace people in the world; and, moreover, there were certain types into which he could throw himself with real vigour. He can appreciate energy when it does not take a strain of too obvious romance. His best novel, he thinks, and his readers must agree with him, was the *Last Chronicle of Barset*. The poor parson, Mr. Crawley, is at once the most lifelike and (in his sense) the most improbable of his characters. He is the embodiment of Trollope's own "doggedness." One fancies that Trollope's memory of his sufferings under the "three hundred tyrants" of his schooldays, and of his father's flounderings in money matters, entered into sympathy with his hero. Anyhow, the man with his strange wrong-headed conscientiousness, his honourable independence, blended with bitter resentment against the more successful, and the strong domestic affections, which yet make him a despot in his family, is a real triumph of which more ambitious novelists might be proud.

Such men, he might have observed, though exceptional, are far more real than the average persons with whom he is generally content. Another triumph of which he speaks with justifiable complacency, is the famous Mrs. Proudie. He knew, he declares, "all the little shades of her character." She was bigoted, bullying, and vulgar, but really conscientious, no hypocrite, and at last dies in bitter regret for the consequences of her misrule. He killed her because he heard two clergymen in the Athenæum complaining of her too frequent reappearances. But he thoroughly enjoyed her, and continued, as he declares, to "live much in company with her ghost." I should guess, though I cannot speak from a wide personal observation of the class, that no British bishop was ever so thoroughly henpecked as Dr. Proudie. The case was at any rate exceptional, and yet, or therefore, is thoroughly lifelike. Mrs. Proudie, that is, is one genuine type, albeit a very rare one, of the Englishwoman of the period, and Trollope draws her vigorously, because her qualities are only an excessive development of very commonplace failings. In such cases Trollope can deal with his characters vigorously and freely, and we do not feel that their vitality has been lowered from a mistaken desire to avoid a strain upon our powers of belief. He can really understand people on a

certain plane of intelligence. His pompous officials at public offices, and dull members of Parliament, and here and there such disreputable persons as he ventures to sketch, as, for example, the shrewd contractor in *Dr. Thorne*, who is ruined by his love of gin, are solid and undeniable realities. We see the world as it was, only in a dark mirror which is incapable of reflecting the fairer shades of thought and custom.

Hawthorne's appreciation of Trollope's strain was perhaps due in part to his conviction that John Bull was a huge mass of solid flesh incapable of entering the more ethereal regions of subtle fancy of which he was himself a native. Trollope was to him a John Bull convicting himself out of his own mouth, and yet a good fellow in his place. When our posterity sits in judgment, it will discover, I hope, that the conventional John Bull is only an embodiment of one set of the national qualities, and by no means an exhaustive portrait of the original. But taking Trollope to represent the point of view from which there is a certain truthfulness in the picture—and no novelist can really do more than give one set of impressions—posterity may after all consider his novels as a very instructive document. Perhaps, though it would be idle to prophesy confidently, one remark will be suggested: The middle of the nineteenth


century—our descendants may possibly say—was really a time in which a great intellectual, political, and social revolution was beginning to make itself perceptible. The vast changes now (that is, in the twenty-first century) so familiar to everybody could then have been foretold by any intelligent observer. And yet in this ancient novelist we see the society of the time, the squires and parsons and officials, and the women whom they courted, entirely unconscious of any approaching convulsions; imagining that their little social arrangements were to endure for ever, that their social conventions were the only ones conceivable; and, on the whole, mainly occupied in carrying on business in a humdrum way and sweetening life by flirtation with healthy and pretty young women without two ideas in their heads. Then they will look back to the early days of Queen Victoria as a delightful time, when it was possible to take things quietly, and a good, sound, sensible optimism was the prevalent state of mind. How far the estimate would be true is another question; but Trollope, as representing such an epoch, will supply a soothing if rather mild stimulant for the imagination, and it will be admitted that if he was not among the highest intellects of his benighted time, he was as sturdy, wholesome, and kindly a human being as could be desired.

## Robert Louis Stevenson

NEARLY thirty years have passed since Stevenson began to attract a circle of appreciative readers. From the first it was clear that the literary appreciation coincided with a personal attraction. As his fame extended, the admiration of readers remotest in the flesh had a tinge of friendship, while the inner circle could not distinguish between their enthusiastic affection for the man and their cordial enjoyment of his genius. So far as the biographer is concerned, the identity of the two sentiments is a clear gain. Affection, though not a sufficient, is an almost necessary qualification for a good biography. It may be doubted, however, whether a man's friends are his best critics. The keen eye of the candid outsider has detected a tacit conspiracy in this case. The circle of friends looks unpleasantly like a clique, trying to gain a reflex glory from the fame of its hero, or to make a boast of its superior insight. The connection, it is true, has other dangers. The tie may be broken, and the rupture, it appears, cancels all obligations to reticence.

No one can then lay on the lash like the old friend who knows the weak places and has, or fancies that he has, an injury to resent. But even fidelity to old ties is not necessarily blinding. No one can read Mr. Colvin's notes upon his friend's letters without admitting that his friendship has sharpened his insight. To him belongs the credit of having been the first, outside the home circle, to recognise Stevenson's genius and to give encouragement when encouragement was most needed. The keen interest enabled him to interpret both the personal and the artistic characteristics of his friend with a clearness which satisfies of the essential fidelity of the portrait. If we differ from the valuation which he puts upon certain qualities, he gives essential help to perceiving them. We often learn more from the partisan than from the candid historian; and in criticism, as well as in history, candour may be an alias for insensibility.

It was to Mr. Colvin that I owe what is perhaps my chief claim to such respect as readers of a periodical may concede to an editor. Through his good offices, Stevenson became one of my contributors, and I may be allowed to boast that, in his case at least, I did not nip rising genius in the bud—the feat which, according to some young authors, represents the main desire of the edito-



rial mind. Fate, however, withheld from me the privilege of forming such an intimacy as could materially bias my opinions; and so far I have a negative qualification for answering the question, which so many people are eager to put: What, namely, will posterity think about Stevenson? I am content to leave the point to posterity; but in trying to sum up my own impressions, corrected by the judgment of his closer friends and critics, I may contribute to the discussion of the previous question: What is the species, not what is the degree, of praise which he will receive? Friendly criticism is apt to fail in this direction. Enthusiasts fancy that to define a man's proper sphere is to limit his merits; they assume that other sects are necessarily hostile, and that they must remove another bust from Poets' Corner in order to make room for doing honour to their favourite. Such controversies lead to impossible problems and attempts to find a common measure for disparate qualities. We may surely by this time agree that Tennyson and Browning excelled in different lines without asking which line was absolutely best. That will always be a matter of individual taste.

Whatever Stevenson was, he was, I think, a man of genius. I do not mean to bring him under any strict definition. My own conception



of genius has been formed by an induction from the very few cases which I have been fortunate enough to observe. I may try to describe one characteristic by perverting the language of one of those instances. The late W. K. Clifford, who had the most unmistakable stamp of genius, held that the universe was composed of "mind-stuff." I do not know how that may be, but a man has genius, I should say, when he seems to be made of nothing but "mindstuff." We of coarser make have a certain infusion of mind; but it is terribly cramped and held down by matter. What we call "thinking" is often a mechanical process carried on by dead formulæ. We work out results as a phonograph repeats the sound when you insert the diaphragm already impressed with the pattern. The mental processes in the man of genius are still vital instead of being automatic. He has, as Carlyle is fond of repeating about Mirabeau, "swallowed all formulas," or, rather, he is not the slave but the master of those useful intellectual tools. It is this pervading vitality which has marked such geniuses as I have known, though it assumes very various forms. A proposition of Euclid, such as "coaches" hammer into the head of a dunce to be reproduced by rote, developed instantly, when inserted into Clifford's brain, into whole systems

of geometry. Genius of a different type was shown by the historian J. R. Green. You pointed out a bit of old wall, or a slope of down, and it immediately opened to him a vista of past ages, illustrating bygone social states and the growth of nations. So Stevenson heard an anecdote and it became at once the nucleus of a story, and he was on the spot a hero of romance plunging into a whole series of thrilling adventures. Connected with this, I suppose, is the invincible boyishness so often noticed as a characteristic of genius. The mind which retains its freshness can sympathise with the child to whom the world is still a novelty. Both Clifford and Green were conspicuous for this possession of the prerogative of genius, and showed it both in being boyish themselves and in their intense sympathy with children. Clifford was never happier than in a child's party, and Green sought relief from the dreariness of a clergyman's life at the East-end by associating with the children of the district. Stevenson's boyishness was not only conspicuous, but was the very mainspring of his best work. That quality cannot be shown in a mathematical dissertation or an historical narrative, but it is invaluable for a writer of romances. The singular vivacity of Stevenson's early memories is shown by Mr. Balfour's account of his infancy as it was suffi-


ciently revealed in the delightful *Child's Garden*. It is amusing to note that Stevenson could not even imagine that other men should be without this experience. You are indulging in "wilful paradox," he replied to Mr. Henry James. "If a man have never been [Mr. James alleged that he had not been] on a quest for hidden treasure, it can be demonstrated that he has never been a child." His scheme of life, as he puts it in a charming letter to Mr. Monkhouse, was to be alternately a pirate and a leader of irregular cavalry "devastating whole valleys." Some of us, I fear, have never been pirates; and if we were anything, were perhaps already preaching infantile sermons. In any case, the castle-building propensity is often so weak as not even to leave a trace in memory. Stevenson's most obvious peculiarity was that it only strengthened with life, and, which is rarer, always retained some of the childish colouring.

A common test—for it is surely not the essence—of genius is the proverbial capacity for taking pains. Stevenson again illustrates the meaning of the remark. Nothing is easier, says a recent German philosopher, than to give a receipt for making yourself a good novelist. Write a hundred drafts, none of them above two pages long: let each be so expressed that every word is

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necessary: practise putting anecdotes into the most pregnant and effective shapes; and after ten years devoted to these and various subsidiary studies you will have completed your apprenticeship. Few novelists, I suppose, carry out this scheme to the letter; but Stevenson might have approved the spirit of the advice. Nobody would adopt it unless he had the passion for the art, which is a presumption of genius, and, without genius, the labour would be wasted. That, indeed, raises one of those points which are so delightful to discuss because they admit of no precise solution. When people ask whether "form" or "content," style or matter, be the most important, it is like asking whether order or progress should be the aim of a statesman, or whether strength or activity be most needed for an athlete. Both are essential, and neither excellence will supersede necessity for the other. If you have nothing to say, there is no manner of saying it well; and if not well said, your something is as good as nothing. For Stevenson, the question of style was the most pressing. His mind was already, as it continued to be, swarming with any number of projects; he was always acting "some fragment from his dream of human life"; the storehouse of his imagination was full to overflowing, and the question was not what to say but


how to say it. Moreover, a singular delicacy of organisation gave him a love of words for their own sake; the mere sound of "Jehovah Tsidkenu" gave him a thrill (it does not thrill me!); he was sensitive from childhood to assonance and alliteration, and in his later essay upon the "technical elements of style" shows how a sentence in the *Areopagitica* involves a cunning use of the letters P V F. Language, in short, had to him a music independent of its meaning. That, no doubt, is one element of literary effect, though without a fine ear it would be hopeless to decide what pleases; and the finest ear cannot really explain what are the conditions of pleasing. This precocious sensitiveness developed into a clear appreciation of various qualities of style. Like other young men, he began by imitating; taking for models such curiously different writers as Hazlitt, Sir Thomas Browne, Defoe, Hawthorne, Montaigne, Beaudelaire, and Ruskin. In the ordinary cases imitation implies that the model is taken as a master. Milton probably meant, in youth, to be a second Spenser. But the variety of Stevenson's models implies an absence of strict discipleship. He was trying to discover the secret which gave distinction to any particular style; and without adopting the manner would know how to apply it on occasion for any desired effect. How



impressionable he was is curiously shown by his statement, towards the end of his life, that he would not read Livy for fear of the effect upon his style. He had long before acquired a style of his own so distinctive that such a danger would strike no one else. I will not dwell upon its merits. They have been set forth, far better than I could hope to do, in Professor Raleigh's admirable study. He is a critic who shares the perceptiveness of his author. I will only note one point. A "stylist" sometimes becomes a mannerist; he acquires tricks of speech which intrude themselves inappropriately. Stevenson's general freedom from this fault implies that hatred to the commonplace formula of which I have spoken. His words are always alive. He came to insist chiefly upon the importance of condensation. "There is but one art," he says, "the art to omit"; or, as Pope puts it, perhaps more accurately, "the last and greatest art" is "the art to blot." That is a corollary from the theory of the right word. A writer is an "amateur," says Stevenson, "who says in two sentences what can be said in one." The artist puts his whole meaning into one perfectly accurate line, while a feeble hand tries to correct one error by superposing another, and ends by making a blur of the whole.

Stevenson, by whatever means, acquired not

only a delicate style, but a style of his own. If it sometimes reminds one of models, it does not suggest that he is speaking in a feigned voice. I think, indeed, that this precocious preoccupation with style suggests the excess of self-consciousness which was his most obvious weakness; a daintiness which does not allow us to forget the presence of the artist. But Stevenson did not yield to other temptations which beset the lover of exquisite form. He was no "æsthete" in the sense which conveys a reproach. He did not sympathise with the doctrine that an artist should wrap up himself in luxurious hedonism and cultivate indifference to active life. He was too much of a boy. A true boy cannot be "æsthetic." He had "day-dreams," but they were of piracy; tacit aspirations towards stirring adventure and active heroism. His dreams were of a future waking. Stevenson's energies had to take the form of writing; and though he talks about his "art" a little more solemnly than one would wish, he betrays a certain hesitation as to its claims. In a late essay, he suggests that a man who has failed in literature should take to some "more manly way of life." To "live by pleasure," he declares, "is not a high calling"; and he illustrates the proposition by speaking of such a life (not quite seriously) as a kind of intellectual prostitution.



He laments his disqualification for active duties. "I think *David Balfour* a nice little book," he says, "and very artistic and just the thing to occupy the leisure of a busy life; but for the top flower of a man's life it seems to be inadequate. . . . I could have wished to be otherwise busy in this world. I ought to have been able to build lighthouses and write *David Balfours* too." This may be considered as the legitimate outcome of the boyish mood. It might have indicated a budding Nelson instead of a budding writer of romance. One result was the curious misunderstanding set forth in the interesting letters to Mr. William Archer. Mr. Archer had pleased him by an early appreciation; but had—as Stevenson complains—taken him for a "rosy-gilled æsthetic-æsthete"; whereas he was really at this time "a rickety and cloistered spectre." To Mr. Archer, Stevenson's optimism had seemed to indicate superabundant health, and a want of familiarity with sorrow and sickness. A rheumatic fever, it was suggested, would try his philosophy. Mr. Archer's hypothesis (if fairly reported) was of course the reverse of the fact. Stevenson's whole career was a heroic struggle against disease, and it is needless to add that his sympathy with other sufferers was such as became an exquisitely sensitive nature. Neither would he admit that he



overlooked the enormous mass of evil in the world. His view is characteristic. His own position as an invalid, with "the circle of impotence closing very slowly but quite steadily round him," makes him indignant with the affectation of the rich and strong "bleating about their sorrows and the burthen of life." In a world so full of evil "one dank and dispirited word" is harmful, and it is the business of art to present gay and bright pictures which may send the reader on his way rejoicing. Then, ingeniously turning the tables, he argues that Mr. Archer's acceptance of pessimism shows him to be a happy man "raging at the misery of others." Had his critic tried for himself "what happiness was like," he would have found how much compensation it contains. He admits the correctness of one of Mr. Archer's remarks, that he has a "voluntary aversion from the painful sides of life." On the voyage to the leper settlement at Molokai he speaks of the Zola view of the human animal; and upon reaching the place sees "sights that cannot be told and hears stories that cannot be repeated." M. Zola would have managed perhaps to tell and repeat. Stevenson is sickened by the spectacle but "touched to the heart by the sight of lovely and effective virtues in the helpless." The background of the loathsome is there; but

he would rather dwell upon the moral beauty relieved against it.

Stevenson might certainly claim that his optimism did not imply want of experience or want of sympathy. And, indeed, one is inclined to ask why the question should be raised at all. A man must be a very determined pessimist if he thinks it wrong for an artist to express moods of cheerfulness or the simple joy of eventful living. We may surely be allowed to be sometimes in high spirits. It would require some courage to infer from *Treasure Island* that the author held any philosophy. Stevenson, of course, was not a philosopher in such a sense as would have entitled him to succeed to the chair of Sir William Hamilton at Edinburgh. Yet it is true that he had some very strong and very characteristic convictions upon the questions in which philosophy touches the conduct of life. The early difficulties, the abandonment of the regular professional careers, the revolt against the yoke of the lesser catechism, the sentence to a life of invalidism enforced much reflection, some results of which are embodied in various essays. A curious indication of the progress of thought is given in his account of the "books which influenced him." It is a strangely miscellaneous list. He begins with Shakespeare, Dumas, and Bunyan; then comes

Montaigne, always a favourite; next, "in order of time," the Gospel according to St. Matthew; and then Walt Whitman. By an odd transition (as he observes elsewhere) Walt Whitman's influence blends with that of Mr. Herbert Spencer. "I should be much of a hound," he says, "if I lost my gratitude to Herbert Spencer." Next comes Lewes's *Life of Goethe*—though there is no one whom he "less admires than Goethe." Martial, Marcus Aurelius, Wordsworth, and Mr. George Meredith's *Egoist* follow, and he notes that an essay of Hazlitt "on the spirit of obligation" formed a "turning-point in his life." One would have been glad of a comment upon the last, for the essay is one in which Hazlitt shows his most cynical side, and explains how frequently envy and selfishness are concealed under a pretence of conferring obligations. Stevenson, perhaps, took it as he took Mr. Meredith's novel, for an ethical lecture, revealing the Protean forms of egoism more or less common to us all.

Stevenson clearly was not one of the young gentlemen who get up a subject systematically. He read as chance and curiosity dictated. A new author did not help him to fill up gaps in a theory, but became a personal friend, throwing out pregnant hints and suggesting rapid glances from various points of view into different aspects

of life. Each writer in turn carried on a lively and suggestive conversation with him; but he cares little for putting their remarks into the framework of an abstract theory. He does not profess to form any judgment of Mr. Spencer's system; he is content to find him "bracing, manly, and honest." He feels the ethical stimulant. He is attracted by all writers whose words have the ring of genuine first-hand conviction; who reveal their own souls—with a good many defects, it may be, but at least bring one into contact with a bit of real unsophisticated human nature. He can forgive Walt Whitman's want of form, and rejoice in the "barbaric yawp" which utterly rejects and denounces effete conventionalism. What he hates above all is the Pharisee. "Respectability," he says in *Lay Morals*, is "the deadliest gag and wet blanket that can be laid on man." He is, that is to say, a Bohemian; but he is a Bohemian who is tempered for good, or (as some critics would say) for bad, by morality and the lesser catechism. He sympathises with Whitman's combination of egoism and altruism. "Morality has been ceremoniously extruded at the door [by Whitman] only to be brought in again by the window." So Stevenson's Bohemianism only modifies without obliterating his moral prejudices. Scotsman as he was to the verge of

fanaticism, he refused to shut his eyes to the coarser elements in the national idol. The *Lay Morals* is specially concerned with the danger of debasing the moral currency. In spirit the Christian principles are absolutely right; but as soon as they are converted into an outward law, the spirit tends to be superseded by the letter, and the hypocrite finds a convenient shelter under the formula which has parted company from the true purpose. An interesting bit of autobiography is made to illustrate the point. "Thou shalt not steal," he says, is a good rule; but what is stealing? Something is to be said for the communist theory that property is theft. While his father was supporting him at the university, where he was surrounded by fellow-students whose lives were cramped by poverty, he considered that his allowance could be excusable only when regarded as a loan advanced by mankind. He lived as sparingly as he could, grudged himself all but necessities, and hoped that in time he might repay the debt by his services.

No very definite conclusion was to emerge from such speculation. Stevenson was to become a novelist, not a writer of systematic treatises upon ethics or sociology. The impulses, however, survived in various forms. They are shown, for example, in the striking essay called *Pulvis et*


*Umbra.* It is his answer to the pessimistic view of men considered as merely multiplying and struggling units. Everywhere we find that man has yet aspirations and imperfect virtues. "Of all earth's meteors," he says, "here, at least, is the most strange and consoling: that this ennobled lemur, this hair-crowned bubble of the dust, this inheritor of a few years and sorrows, should yet deny himself his rare delights and add to his frequent pains and live for an ideal, however misconceived." This view implies his sympathy with the publican as against the Pharisee. We should cherish whatever aspirations may exist, even in the pot-house or the brothel, instead of simply enforcing conformity to the law. We should like the outcast because he is, after all, the really virtuous person. To teach a man blindly to obey public opinion is to "discredit in his eyes the one authoritative voice of his own soul. He may be a docile citizen; he will never be a man." The sanctity of the individual in this sense explains, perhaps, what was the teaching in which Walt Whitman and Mr. Herbert Spencer seemed to him to coincide.

The "philosophy" is the man. It is the development of the old boyish sentiment. Disease and trouble might do their worst; the career of the "pirate," or even more creditable forms of the

adventurous, might be impracticable; but at least he could meet life gallantly, find inexhaustible interest even in trifling occupations when thrown upon his back by ill-health, and cheer himself against temptations to pessimistic melancholy by sympathy with every human being who showed a touch of the heroic spirit. His essay upon the old *Admirals* is characteristic. His heart goes out to Nelson, with his "peerage or Westminster Abbey," and even more to the four marines of the *Wager*, abandoned of necessity to a certain death, but who yet, as they watched their comrades pulling away, gave three cheers and cried, "God bless the King!" In *Æs Triplex* he gives the same moral with a closer application to himself:

It is best [he says] to begin your folio; even if the doctor does not give you a year, even if he hesitates about a month, make one brave push, see what can be finished in a week. . . . All who have meant good work with their whole heart have done good work, although they may die before they have the time to sign it. . . . Life goes down with a better grace foaming in full tide over a precipice, than miserably struggling to an end in sandy deltas.


That, he explains, is the true meaning of the saying about those whom the gods love. At whatever age death may come, the man who dies so dies young.



This gallant spirit, combined with extraordinarily quick and vivid sympathy, gives, I think, a main secret of the charm which endeared Stevenson both to friends and readers. His writings showed anything but the insensibility to human sorrows of the jovial, full-blooded athlete. It must be admitted, however, that if he did not ignore the darker side of things, he disliked dwelling upon it or admitting the necessity of surrender to melancholy, or even to incorporating sad thoughts in your general view of life. In some of his early work, especially in *Ordered South*, his first published essay, and in *Will o' the Mill*, a different note of sentiment is sounded. The invalid ordered south is inclined to console himself by reflecting that he is "one too many in the world." This, says Stevenson in a later note, is a "very youthful view." As prolonged life brings more interests, the thought that we cannot play out our part becomes more, not less, painful. To some of us, I fear, every year that we live only emphasises our insignificance. To Stevenson such resignation savoured of cowardice. *Will o' the Mill* is certainly one of his most finished and exquisite pieces of work. He told Mr. Balfour that it was written as an "experiment." His own favourite doctrine was that "acts may be forgiven, but not even God can forgive the hanger-



back." *Will o' the Mill* was written "to see what could be said in support of the opposite theory." The essay suggests the influence of Hawthorne and shows a similar skill in symbolising a certain mood. It implies, no doubt, a capacity for so far assuming the mood as to make it harmonious or self-consistent; but I cannot perceive that it makes it attractive. Translated into vulgar realism, Will would be a stout innkeeper, who will not risk solid comfort by marrying the girl whom he likes. He hardly loves her. He prefers to help his guests to empty his cellar. Will lives in so vague a region that we do not detest him as we should in real life; but, after all, the story affects me less as an apology than as a satire. If that be really all that can be said for the prudential view of life, it is surely as contemptible as Stevenson thought the corresponding practice. He has a little grudge against Matthew Arnold, whose general merits he acknowledges, for having introduced him to Obermann, for in Obermann he finds only "inhumanity." The contrast is shown, as Professor Raleigh points out, by Arnold's poem on the *Grande Chartreuse* and Stevenson's *Our Lady of the Snows*. Arnold is tempted for the time to seek peace among the recluses, though he cannot share their belief. Stevenson treats them to a sharp remonstrance.



He prefers to be "up and doing." He warns them that the Lord takes delight in deeds, and approves those who—

Still with laughter, song, and shout,  
Spin the great wheel of earth about.

"Perhaps," he concludes,

Our cheerful general on high  
With careless look may pass you by.

If I had to accept either estimate as complete, I should agree with Stevenson. Yet Stevenson's attitude shows his limitations. The sentiment which makes men ascetic monks—the conviction of the corruption of mankind, of the futility of all worldly pleasures, the renunciation of the active duties of life, and the resolute trampling upon the flesh as the deadly enemy of the spirit—may strike us as cowardly and immoral, or at best representing Milton's "fugitive and cloistered virtue." Still it is a mood which has been so conspicuous in many periods that it is clearly desirable to recognise whatever appeal it contained to the deeper instincts of humanity. Matthew Arnold recurred fondly but provisionally to the peacefulness and harmony of the old order of conception, though he was as convinced as any one that it rested on a decayed foundation.

The enlightenment of the species is, of course, desirable, and may lead ultimately to a more satisfactory solution; but for the moment its destructive and materialising tendencies justify a tender treatment of the survival of the old ideal. Stevenson was no bigot, and could most cordially admire the Catholic spirit as embodied in the heroism of a Father Damien. But when it took this form of simple renunciation it did not appeal to him. In fact, it corresponds to the kind of pessimism which was radically uncongenial. Life, for him, is, or can be made, essentially bright and full of interest. He agrees with Mr. Herbert Spencer that it is a duty to be happy; and to be happy not by crushing your instincts but by finding employment for them. Confined to his bed and sentenced to silence, he could still preserve his old boyishness; even his childish amusements. "We grown people," he says in an essay, "can tell ourselves a story, give and take strokes till the bucklers ring, ride far and fast, marry, fall, and die—all the while sitting quietly by the fire or lying prone in bed"; whereas a child must have a toy sword or fight with a bit of furniture. Indeed, he was not above toys in later days. He spent a large part of one winter, as Mr. Balfour tells us, building with toy bricks; and, beginning to join in a schoolboy's amusement

of tin soldiers, developed an elaborate "war game" which occupied many hours at Davos. We can understand why Symonds called him "sprite." The amazing vitality which kept him going under the most depressing influences was combined with the "sprite's" capricious and, to most adults, unintelligible modes of spending superfluous energy. Whatever he took up, serious or trifling—novel writing, childish toys, or even, for a time, political agitation, he threw his whole soul into it as if it were the sole object of existence. He impressed one at first sight as a man whose nerves were always in a state of over-tension. Baxter says that Cromwell was a man "of such a vivacity, hilarity, and alacrity as another man hath when he hath drunken a cup too much."<sup>1</sup> Stevenson—not very like Cromwell in other respects—seemed to find excitement a necessity of existence. He speaks to a correspondent of the timidity of youth. "I was," he says, "a particularly brave boy"—ready to plunge into rash adventures, but "in fear of that strange blind machinery in which I stood. I fear life still," he adds, and "that terror for an adventurer like myself is one of the chief joys of living." Terror keeps one wide-awake and highly strung.

<sup>1</sup> A similar remark was made about Ninon de l'Enclos. They make a queer trio.

Inextinguishable playfulness, with extraordinary quickness of sympathy, an impulsiveness which means accessibility to every generous and heroic nature, and a brave heart in a feeble body ought to be, as they are, most fascinating qualities. But it is true that they imply a limitation. So versatile a nature, glancing off at every contact, absorbed for the moment by every impulse, has not much time for listening to the "Cherub Contemplation." Stevenson turns from "the painful aspects of life," not from the cowardice which refuses to look evils in the face, but from the courage which manages to treat them as a counter-irritant. His "view of life," he says, "is essentially the comic and the romantically comic." He loves, as he explains, the comedy "which keeps the beauty and touches the terrors of life"; which tells its story "not with one eye of pity but with the two of pity and mirth." We should arrange our little drama so that, without ignoring the tragic element, the net outcome may be a state of mind in which the terror becomes, as danger became to Nelson, a source of joyous excitement.

What I have so far said has more direct application to the essayist than to the novelist; and to most readers, I suppose, the novelist is the more interesting of the two. As an essayist, however, Stevenson becomes an unconscious critic of the

stories. The essays define the point of view adopted by the story-teller. One quality is common to all his writings. The irrepressible youthfulness must be remembered, to do justice to the essays. We must not ask for deep thought employed upon long experience; or expect to be impressed, as we are impressed in reading Bacon, by aphorisms in which the wisdom of a lifetime seems to be concentrated. We admire the quick feeling, the dexterity and nimbleness of intellect. The thought of "Crabbed Age and Youth" is obvious enough, but the performance reminds us of Robin Oig in *Kidnapped*. Robin repeated the air played by Alan Breck, but "with such ingenuity and sentiment, with so odd a fancy and so quick a knack in the grace-notes, that I was amazed to hear him." Stevenson's "grace-notes" give fresh charm to the old theme. The critical essays, again, may not imply a very wide knowledge of literature or familiarity with orthodox standards of judgment. They more than atone for any such defects by the freshness and the genuine ring of youthful enthusiasm. I am hopelessly unable, for example, to appreciate Walt Whitman. Stevenson himself only regretted that he had qualified his enthusiasm by noticing too pointedly some of his author's shortcomings. The shortcomings still stick in my throat; but if I

cannot catch the enthusiasm, my dulness is so far enlightened that I can partly understand why Whitman fascinated Stevenson and other good judges. That, at least, is so much clear gain. To read Stevenson's criticisms is like revisiting a familiar country with a young traveller who sees it for the first time. He probably makes some remarks that we have heard before; but he is capable of such a thrill of surprise as Keats received from Chapman's *Homer*.

The "love of youth," says Mr. Henry James in an admirable essay, "is the beginning and end of Stevenson's message." Mr. James was writing before Stevenson's last publications, and was thinking specially, perhaps, of *Treasure Island*. Now to me—I confess, for I fear that it is a confession—*Treasure Island* is the one story which I can admire without the least qualification or reserve. The aim may not be the highest, but it is attained with the most thorough success. It may be described as a "message" in the sense that it appeals to the boyish element. Stevenson has described the fit of inspiration in which he wrote it. He had a schoolboy for audience; his father became a schoolboy to collaborate; and when published it made schoolboys of Gladstone and of the editor of the "cynical" *Saturday Review*. We believe in it as we believe in *Robinson*

*Crusoe*. My only trouble is that I have always thought that, had I been in command of the *Hispaniola*, I should have adopted a different line of defence against the conspirators. My plan would have spoilt the story, but I regret the error as I regret certain real blunders which were supposed to have changed the course of history. I have always wondered that, after such a proof of his powers of fascination, Stevenson should only have achieved full recognition by *Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde*. That book, we are told, was also written in a fit of inspiration, suggested by dreaming a "fine bogey tale." The public liked it because it became an allegory—a circumstance, I fear, which does not attract me. But considered as a "bogey tale," able to revive the old thrill of delicious horror in one who does not care for psychical research, it has the same power of carrying one away by its imaginative intensity. These masterpieces in their own way suggest one remark. Mr. Balfour points out that Stevenson did an enormous quantity of work, considering not only his ill-health, but the fact that he often worked very slowly, that he destroyed many sketches, and that he rewrote some articles as often as seven or eight times. Thanks to his "dire industry," as he said himself, he had "done more with smaller gifts [one must excuse the



modest formula] than almost any man of letters in the world." This restless energy, however, did not mean persistent labour upon one task, but a constant alternation of tasks. When inspiration failed him for one book, he took up another, and waited for the fit to return. One result is that there is often a want of continuity, when his stories do not, as in *Treasure Island*, represent a single uninterrupted effort. *Kidnapped*, for example, is made up of two different stories, and *The Wrecker* is a curious example of piecing together heterogeneous fragments. Moreover, a good deal of the work is the product of a feebler exercise of the fancy intercalated between the general fits of inspiration. The undeniably successful books, where he has thrown himself thoroughly into the spirit of the story, stand out amidst a good deal of very inferior merit. I will confine myself to speaking of the four Scottish novels which appear to be accepted as his best achievements, and to endeavouring to point out what was the proper sphere of his genius.

They represent a development of the *Treasure Island* method. He began *Kidnapped* as another book for boys, and the later stories may be classed for some purposes with the Waverley series. Stevenson was fond of discussing the classification of novels. He contrasts the "novel of adventure,"

the novel of character, and the dramatic novel. Properly speaking, this is not a classification of radically different species, but an indication of the different sources of interest upon which a novelist may draw. "Adventure" need not exclude "character." A perfect novel might accept, with a change of name, Mr. Meredith's title *The Ordeal of Richard Feverel*. The facts are interesting, because they show character in the crucible; and the character displays itself most forcibly by the resulting action. A complete fusion, however, is no doubt rare, and requires consummate art. *Treasure Island*, of course, is a pure novel of adventure. It satisfies what he somewhere describes as the criterion of a good "romance." The writer and his readers throw themselves into the events, enjoy the thrilling excitement, and do not bother themselves with questions of psychology. *Treasure Island*, indeed, contains Silver, who, to my mind, is his most successful hero. But Silver incarnates the spirit in which the book is to be read: the state of mind in which we accept genial good humour as a complete apology for cold-blooded murder. Piracy is for the time to be merely one side of the game; and in a serious picture of human life, which is of course out of that sphere, we should have required a further attempt to reconcile us to the psychological

monstrosity. In the later stories we assume that the adventurers are to be themselves interesting as well as the adventure. Still, the story is to hold the front place. We may come to be attracted to the problems of character presented by the author, but the development of the story must never for a moment be sacrificed to expositions of the sentiments. We must not expect from Stevenson such reflections as Thackeray indulges upon the "Vanity of Vanities" or a revelation, such as George Eliot gives in *The Mill on the Floss*, of the inner life of the heroine. Either method may be right for its own purpose; and I mean so far only to define, not to criticise, Stevenson's purpose. Not only is it possible to tell a story in Stevenson's manner, "cutting off the flesh off the bones" of his stories, as he says, and yet to reveal the characters; but critics who object to all intrusions of the author as commentator hold this to be the most legitimate and effective method of revelation. Here, however, the limitation means something more than a difference of method. I do not think, to speak frankly, that any novelist of power comparable to his has created so few living and attractive characters. Mr. Sidney Colvin confesses to having been for a time blinded to the imaginative force of *The Ebb Tide* by his dislike to the three wretched

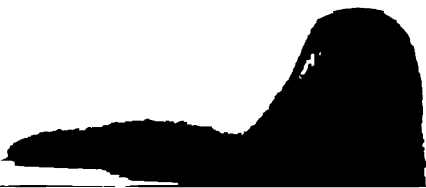
heroes. One is deservedly shot, and the two others, credited with some redeeming points, lose whatever interest they possessed when they accept conversion to avoid death from a missionary's revolver. However vivid the scenery, I cannot follow the fate of such wretches with a pretence of sympathy. There is a similar drawback about *The Master of Ballantrae*. The younger brother, who is blackmailed by the utterly reprobate Master, ought surely to be interesting instead of being simply sullen and dogged. In the later adventures, we are invited to forgive him on the ground that his brain has been affected; but the impression upon me is that he is sacrificed throughout to the interests of the story. He is cramped in character because a man of any real strength would have broken the meshes upon which the adventure depends. The curious exclusion of women is natural in the purely boyish stories, since to a boy woman is simply an incumbrance upon reasonable modes of life. When in *Catriona* Stevenson introduces a love-story, it is still unsatisfactory because David Balfour is so much of the undeveloped animal that his passion is clumsy, and his charm for the girl unintelligible. I cannot feel, to say the truth, that in any of these stories I am really living among human beings with whom, apart

from their adventures, I can feel any very lively affection or antipathy. Mr. Balfour praises Stevenson for his sparing use of the pathetic. That is to apologise for a weakness on the ground that it is not the opposite weakness. It is quite true that an excessive use of pathos is offensive, but it is equally true that a power of appealing to our sympathies by genuine pathos is a mark of the highest power in fiction. The novelist has to make us feel that it is a necessity, not a mere luxury; that he is forced to weep, not weeping to exhibit his sensibility; but to omit it altogether is to abnegate one of his chief functions. That Stevenson's feelings, far from being cold, were abnormally keen, can be doubted by no one; but his view of fiction keeps him out of the regions in which pathos is appropriate. Anyway, I feel that there is a whole range of sentiment familiar to other writers which Stevenson rarely enters or even touches.

The character to which I am generally referred as a masterpiece is that of Alan Breck. Mr. Henry James speaks of that excellent Highlander as a psychological triumph, and regards him as a study of the passion for glory. Mr. James speaks with authority; and I will admit that he is a very skilful combination of the hero and the braggart—qualities which are sometimes combined, as they

were to some degree in Nelson and Wolfe. Somehow, perhaps because I am not a Gael, I can never feel that he is fully alive. He suggests to me the artist's study, not the man who appeals to us because his creator has really thrown himself unreservedly into the part. When I compare him, for example, with Dugald Dalgetty (I must venture a comparison for once) he seems to illustrate the difference between skilful construction and genial intuition. He may suggest one other point. Scott was for Stevenson the "King of the Romanticists." Romance, as understood by Scott, meant among other things the attempt to revive a picture of old social conditions. He was interested, in his own phraseology, in the contrast between ancient and modern manners, and his favourite periods are those in which the feudal ideals came into conflict with the more modern commercial state. This interest often interferes with his art as a story-teller. The hero of *Waverley*, for example, is a mere walking letter of introduction to Fergus Mac Ivor, the type of a chief of a clan modified by modern civilisation. The story halts in order to give us a full portrait of the state of things in which a semi-barbarous order was confronted with the opposing forces. Scott, in fact, began from a profound interest in the social phenomena (to use a big word) around

him. He was full of the legends, the relics of the old customs and ways of thought, but was also a lawyer and a keen politician. His story-telling often represents a subordinate aim. Stevenson just reverses the process. He started as an "artist," abnormally sensitive to the qualities of style and literary effect to which Scott was audaciously indifferent. His first interest is in any scene or story which will fit in with his artistic purposes. Life swarmed with themes for romance, as rivers are made to supply canals. The attitude is illustrated by his incursions into politics. He was stirred to wrath by Mr. Gladstone's desertion (as he thought it) of Gordon, and could not afterwards write a letter to the guilty statesman because he would have had to sign himself "Your fellow-criminal in the sight of God." He was roused by the boycotting of the Curtin family to such a degree that he could scarcely be withheld from settling on their farm to share their dangers and stir his countrymen to a sense of shame. His righteous indignation in the case of Father Damien, and the zeal with which he threw himself into the Samoan troubles, are equally in character. The small scale of the Samoan business made it a personal question. He came to the conclusion, however, that politics meant "the darkest, most foolish, and most



random of human employments," and, though he had an aversion to Gladstone, had no definite political creed. Political strife, that is, only touched him when some individual case appealed to the chivalrous sentiment. In the same way the story of the clans interests him by its artistic capabilities. The flight of Alan Breck gave an opportunity, seized with admirable skill, for a narrative of exciting adventure; and he takes full advantage of picturesque figures in the history of his time. But one peculiarity is significant. The adventure turns upon a murder which, according to him, was not committed, though certainly not disapproved, by Alan Breck. Now, complicity in murder, or, let us say, homicide, is a circumstance of some importance. Before landlord-shooting is regarded as a venial or a commendable practice, we ought to be placed at the right point of view to appreciate it. We cannot take it as easily as Mr. Silver took piracy. We should see enough of the evictions or of the social state of the clansmen to direct our sympathies. No doubt if Stevenson had insisted upon such things he would have written a different book. He would have had to digress from the adventures and to introduce characters irrelevant in that sense, who might have been types of the classes of a semi-civilised society. Perhaps the



pure story of adventure is a better thing. I only say that it involves the omission of a great many aspects of life which have been the main preoccupation of novelists of a different class. Stevenson once told Mr. Balfour that a novelist might devise a plot and find characters to suit, or he might reverse the process; or, finally, he might take a certain atmosphere and get "both persons and actions to express it." He wrote *The Merry Men* as embodying the sentiment caused by a sight of a Scottish island. That, indeed, is an explanation of some of his most skilful pieces of work, and the South Seas as well as his beloved country gave materials for such "impressionist" pictures. But besides the atmosphere of scenery, there is what may be called the social atmosphere. To reproduce the social atmosphere of a past epoch is the aim—generally missed—of the historical novelist; but it is the prerogative of the more thoughtful novelist to set before you, in concrete types, not only personal character but the moral and intellectual idiosyncrasies of the epoch, whether remote or contemporary. The novelist is not to lecture; but the great novels give the very age and body of the time "its form and feature." I will give no instances because they would be superfluous and also because they would suggest a comparison which I would rather

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The affection which Stevenson inspires needs no justification. The man's extraordinary gallantry, his tender-heartedness, the chivalrous interest so easily roused by any touch of heroism, the generosity shown in his hearty appreciation of possible rivals, are beyond praise. His rapid glances at many aspects of life show real insight and singular delicacy, a sensibility of moral instinct, and the thought is expressed or gently indicated with the most admirable literary tact. The praise of versatility again is justified by the variety of themes which he has touched, always with vivacity and often with a masterly handling within certain limits. When panegyrics, dwelling upon these topics, have been most unreservedly accepted, it is a mistake to claim incompatible merits. The "Bohemian"—taking Stevenson's version of the character—the man who looks from the outside upon the ordinary humdrum citizen, may be a very fascinating personage; but he really lacks something. Delighted with the exceptional and the picturesque, he has less insight into the more ordinary, and, after all, most important springs of action. The excitable temperament, trying to stir every moment of life with some thrill of vivid feeling, and dreaming adventures to fill up every

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interstice of active occupation, is hardly compatible with much reflection. The writer whose writing is the outcome of long experience, who has brooded long and patiently over the problems of life, who has tried to understand the character of his fellows and to form tenable ideals for himself, may not have accepted any systematic philosophy; but he represents the impression made by life upon a thoughtful mind, and has formed some sort of coherent and often professedly interesting judgment upon its merits. He is sometimes a bore, it is true; but sometimes, too, we have experience which is ripe without being mouldy. The rapid, vivid "Sprite," the natural Bohemian impinging upon society at a dozen different parts, turning from the painful aspects of life, and from the first considering life as intended to suggest romance rather than romance as reflecting life, could not possibly secrete that kind of wisdom. He had a charm of his own, and I do not inquire whether it was better or worse; I only think that we do him injustice when we claim merits belonging to a different order. His admirers hold that *Weir of Hermiston* would have shown profounder insight founded upon longer experience. I will not argue the point. That it contains one very powerful scene is undeniable. That it shows power of rivalling on their own ground the

great novelists who have moved in a higher sphere is not plain to me. At any rate, the claim seems to be a tacit admission of the absence of certain qualities from the previous work. "He might have" implies "he did not." But I have said enough to indicate what I take to be the right method of appreciating Stevenson without making untenable claims.

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of theory. We do not know accurately what is the composition of John Bull himself; how much of him, for example, is Celtic and how much Teuton; and few things are more difficult than to describe accurately the characteristics by which one race differs from another. A Frenchman and an Englishman represent different types. We all perceive the difference, but to say precisely in what it consists we should require nothing less than a complete psychology. We may take for granted, however, that we can fairly assume that a national character exists, and that it is very distinctly manifested in the corresponding literature. Then we can make at least some provisional inferences, to be verified or disproved when somebody will tell us what, after all, is the real distinction.

Assuming this, there is no doubt of one conspicuous fact. Buckle remarked in his famous book that the "union of the French with the English intellect was by far the most important fact in the history of the eighteenth century." He shows that nearly all the famous French authors of the century had learned English, and that many had visited England. In the preceding century English was a "barbarous jargon," classed by Corneille, as M. Texte observes, with "Turkish and Sclavonian." M. Texte traces some of the

steps by which the change took place. When Louis XIV. tried to trample out French Protestantism by revoking the Edict of Nantes, he was really scattering the sparks for a new conflagration. Thousands of refugees settled in England, Holland, and elsewhere. Industrious and educated men supported themselves in the humbler walks of literature. In London they naturally drifted into Grub Street, and kept up a correspondence with their countrymen in Holland, which had come to be a great intellectual, as well as commercial, centre of exchange. Such names as Motteux, Boyer, Coste, Desmaiseaux, meet us constantly in the earlier annals of English journalism. They habitually gathered at the "Rainbow" in Marylebone, and formed a kind of literary agency. They sat at the feet of Locke and Newton. They compiled, edited, translated and contributed to the long series of journals published in Holland. Bayle had already paid some attention to English writings in his *Nouvelles de la République des Lettres*; Le Clerc took up the task more thoroughly, and a whole series of journals dealing with English publications were afterward published in Holland. Knowledge of English philosophy and science, and, by degrees, of English literature, spread from The Hague and Amsterdam to the literary circles of France. Then a French-

man or two drifted to England, and translated Addison and Swift. A Swiss traveller, Muralt, published some letters upon England about 1724, and drew a genuine portrait of John Bull, who had really good points in the eyes of a Protestant. Muralt admits that the animal can be fierce and misanthropic, and that his "houmour" turns all things topsy-turvy; but he sympathises heartily with the serious, thoughtful, and vigorous character whose eccentricity is but one side of the independence which had won political liberty. Next came the Abbé Prévost, who passed some years in England, and worked up his experience into various novels, translated many English works, and published some twenty volumes of a magazine which, with much greater vivacity, carried on the work of the Dutch journalists. These writers were eclipsed by Voltaire, whose epoch-making visit to England lasted from 1726 to 1729. Voltaire, as Mr. Morley says, "left France a poet and returned to it a sage." The *Lettres Anglaises* appeared in 1733, and Voltaire was the ambassador who definitely proclaimed the new alliance between the French and the English mind.

The full story, as told by M. Texte, is very interesting, and obviously suggests one comment. The man who was told that so many tons of water fell over Niagara very naturally asked,

"Why should n't they?" That France and England should come into intellectual contact was surely inevitable. The difficulty would have been to keep them apart. Historians of politics or commerce would have no difficulty in showing why the England of George I. should be much more interesting in France than the England of Charles II. The French refugees, no doubt, stimulated, but they could also presuppose, an interest in the nation which had taken so important a position in Europe. Many subsidiary symptoms might be mentioned which lie outside M. Texte's plan. The English influence upon France was partly a result of the French influence upon England. English writers since the Restoration had been assimilating French methods, and Addison and Pope came near enough to Racine and Boileau to be regarded as civilised human beings by Voltaire. Familiarity with their work suggested that there were some merits in the older English literature which they had refined, and that it might be worth while to look at even Shakespeare or other literary ancestors. The English nobleman, conversely, all through the century regarded France as the school of good manners. Bolingbroke and Chesterfield and Horace Walpole felt themselves at home in a society pleasantly contrasted with the clownish and brutal

Squire Westerns who were their neighbours at home and elbowed them in the House of Commons. The "grand tour" enabled the young noble and his bear-leader to get some French polish. He was easily made an honorary member of the highest circles; and men like Hume and Adam Smith were introduced through his patronage to society in which their intellectual eminence was more frankly recognised than in England. There arose a tacit freemasonry between the higher classes. M. Texte points out that the French appreciation of English literature was at its strongest during the wars. The eighteenth-century wars did not imply the profound antipathy of the religious wars of the past or the revolutionary wars to come. The "patriotic idea," says M. Texte, had become feeble. A person of quality often thought himself a gentleman first and a Frenchman or an Englishman afterwards. War to the enlightened aristocrat meant not an internecine struggle, but a game to be played in a sportsmanlike spirit. The English officers did not say at Fontenoy, "Gentlemen of the French Guard, fire first," but that was the spirit in which they might, or ought to, have acted. The "cosmopolitan spirit," in short, was the product of the innumerable causes which were bringing nations into closer intercourse

at their higher levels; and the literary go-betweens were useful "masters of the ceremonies" to bring together people anxious for an introduction. What, then, was Rousseau's special share in the process? Had not Voltaire already opened his countrymen's eyes? This gives the important distinction. Voltaire's special achievement was to make Frenchmen familiar with Locke and Newton—that is, with English philosophy and science. But, though an Englishman may make mathematical discoveries, mathematics cannot be especially English. Two and two make four in Paris as well as in London: and the reasoning of Newton's *Principia* was as valid in French as in English or Latin. Art, as M. Texte says, "is infinitely various"; philosophy is (or ought to be) "one." Though art, therefore, may be national, philosophy must be cosmopolitan. The glory of discovering some new principle may be assigned to this or that country; but once discovered it loses all trace of its origin. How far, in point of fact, Voltaire learned his doctrine from Locke or from Bayle or elsewhere is disputable. In any case, the doctrine, once reached, had to live or die mainly by its logic. The philosophy, indeed, had attracted Voltaire to other characteristics. It was one product of the English character. Britons, he thought, were philosophers because they were



free men, resolved to think as they pleased and to say what they thought. To the earlier generation it only occurred that a race which could kill its king must be more savage than its own mastiffs. Now its fierceness, its rough energy, and sturdy independence, appeared to have its merits. It had made kings know that they "had a lith in their necks"; it could reduce priests into bondage to the State; and a man of letters would not be sent to the Bastille or thrashed with impunity by a great man's valet. The coarseness and eccentricity were but accidental defects of a strong vitality. Such qualities, incorporated in John Bull, attracted Voltaire and his fellows in their contest with the established order in France, and naturally suggested some interest in a literature which showed the same qualities. Voltaire, however, stopped at a certain point: he remained substantially faithful to the old literary ideal of his race; he renounced the Shakespeare whom he had once patronised, and the literary revolution was left to Rousseau.

This marks Rousseau's special function. He not only admired the English character, but introduced English canons of art. He joined the barbarians, whose incursion was still dreaded by Voltaire. The *Nouvelle Héloïse* was admittedly an imitation of Richardson's *Clarissa Harlowe*. Rous-

seau imitated even its defects. The awkwardness, for example, of telling a story by letters leads to comic results in both. The heroes and heroines of both have to sit down at the most exciting moments and pour out reams of correspondence for the benefit of the general public. The likeness of form corresponds to a more important likeness in substance. Richardson and Rousseau are both preachers, and both preachers of a "bourgeois" morality, adapted to the British tradesman or the citizen of a little Swiss town. Both, too, are "realists" in the sense of producing their effects by the minute descriptions of commonplace and ugly facts, the mention of which would be incompatible with the old literary conventions. Thus, though Rousseau has an exquisite style and Richardson no style at all, both represent "a plebeian type of art." This, no doubt, is the truth, and points to an important observation. In fact, Richardson, and another of Rousseau's favourites, Defoe, had stumbled upon a great discovery. Defoe, a thoroughly trained journalist, had found out the secret of successful journalism; the charm of a straightforward circumstantial narrative. He could save trouble by inventing his facts, but to all appearance they must be still simply facts. Defoe had no literary dignity to prevent him from supplying what his

audience really wanted. Richardson, again, began by publishing a series of edifying letters. He afterwards discovered how to make letters interesting by stringing them upon a story. They became a prolonged religious tract, which also happened to be a great romance. Both Defoe and Richardson being men of genius, they founded a new literary genus. But the cause of their immediate success was that they were frankly suiting the taste of a new class of readers. Addison and Pope thought first of gentlemen and scholars, and could not condescend to lower their dignity for readers who cared nothing for the high court of criticism. Voltaire, as M. Texte observes, did not see Defoe in England. Voltaire's friends, that is, were in the upper circle, to which Defoe was utterly inadmissible, and who partly shared Congreve's wish to be regarded as gentlemen, not as authors. To Swift, Defoe was the fellow who stood in the pillory—"I forget his name"; and Pope pleasantly calls him "earless" and "unabashed." To see him, it would have been necessary to descend into the slums. Richardson was eminently respectable, but bishops and deans still write to "good Mr. Richardson" with the condescension of great dons recognising merit in a humble, self-taught scribbler. His work was suited for the inhabitant of Salisbury

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Court, not for St. James's. The novelty was that, as the habit of reading spread to a lower social stratum, literature had to adopt new ideals, and to leave off some of the fine lace and full-bottomed wigs which it still had to wear in the elegant world. Rousseau, brought up in a similar atmosphere, took the hint, and no doubt himself shared the taste of his class. He was the first French writer, so far, to exemplify one symptom of the great social changes which were to bring about the Revolution. Literature in England was already taking the middle class instead of the aristocracy for its patrons. Rousseau naturally sympathised with the "plebeian" tendency, and was ready to take advantage of Richardson's innovation.

The enthusiasm which greeted the *Nouvelle Héloïse* was due, of course, to the sentiment which found easier expression in the new form. Here, again, Richardson was followed by Rousseau. The generation which wept over the wrongs of *Clarissa* was succeeded by the generation which wept over the death of Julie. We, though we have a sentimentalism of our own, find it rather difficult to shed tears upon either tomb. We can see that both writers were men of genius, though we cry "with difficulty" over the pathos. But did Rousseau learn his sentimentalism from Richardson? Would he not have been as sentimental

if Richardson had never existed? And was the "sentimentalism" a specially Northern product transplanted from the Germanic to the Latin races, or a product of conditions common to both? It was in some respects even opposed to the English character. The true founder of the English novel was not Richardson so much as Fielding. To most modern readers, to me certainly, Fielding is incomparably the more readable of the two. I can put myself by an effort into the proper attitude about *Clarissa*; but I can adopt it spontaneously for *Amelia*. Fielding, however, achieved no such popularity abroad as Richardson. One obvious reason is precisely that he was too thorough a John Bull. The great coarse vigorous animal, the "good buffalo," as Taine calls him, disgusted our more refined neighbours. He began by a hearty guffaw at Richardson's "sentimentalism," and embodies the really British view of that product. It is, he held, substantially an unmanly, mawkish affectation, fit only for tea-drinking, effeminate, molly-coddling tradesmen and Frenchified dandies. So far from being specially English, it was everything that was rightfully despised by your lusty Englishman, who held, with "old Mr. Meynell," that "foreigners were fools." No doubt John Bull was already notorious for his

melancholy. He was a victim to the "spleen" and given to committing suicide during his November fogs. Jaques had already learned to suck melancholy out of a song as a weasel sucks eggs, and classified and compounded the various brands of melancholy. Great English poets had invoked "divinest melancholy." We had an "anatomy" of melancholy; and one of the greatest writers of the time had combined melancholy with misanthropy and died "like a poisoned rat in a hole." Swift was melancholy in the true British fashion, but hardly sentimental. Probably enough our national character, or our fogs, predisposed us to a certain gloom, which might take the form of grim humour or tinge imaginative work with sadness. But then, surely a Frenchman can be melancholy too, though he may wear his melancholy with a difference. A characteristic example often noticed is the simultaneous appearance of *Candide* and *Rasselas*, both of them powerful protests against optimism, but couched by the Frenchman in brilliant wit and by the Englishman in ponderous moralising. The true sentiment is the same in both. Pessimism, misanthropy, and melancholy are not the property of any particular race—for reasons only too obvious. Now Rousseau—it requires no proof—was, if ever such a thing existed, a born sentimentalist. He needed

no teacher to explain the luxury of grief or the charm of sad and solitary musing; nor, in fact, would he have found his precise shade of sentimentalism in Richardson. I will not try to define precisely what was the sentimentalism which undoubtedly charmed readers both at home and abroad. But the British product, as it seems to me, was appreciated abroad just in so far as it was not specifically British. The thoroughly national article could not be exported. Richardson's sentimentalism inclined to twaddle; and there is nothing, I fancy, so cosmopolitan as downright twaddle. Obvious little moral commonplaces are current in every market. Twaddle pure and simple, indeed, may be a drug. Richardson's genius, his command of the pathetic and the realistic, was undoubtedly the secret of his success; but it could be assimilated by foreigners, because it was diluted with the obvious morality which is just as good at Geneva as at London. Fielding's work supposed some familiarity with his powerfully-drawn British types, and with the downright brutal common-sense which came like a slap in the face to your pure sentimentalist. Richardson's characters and sentiments have less idiosyncrasy, and can, therefore, be more easily transported. The quality which now makes them odious was then one cause of their success. They

suited the middle class all over the world just because they had not too strong a flavour of their native soil. This suggests another point. M. Texte insists in a very interesting way upon the bond of sympathy due to the common Protestantism of Richardson and Rousseau. The English sentimentalism had obviously a distinct religious colouring. Richardson in literature was a parallel to Wesley in theology. Both men represent the dissatisfaction of the middle classes with the codes which were respected in the upper circles. The "enthusiasm" of Methodists was the antithesis of the "cold morality" of such men as Clarke and Hoadly. In literature, "enthusiasm" became sentimentalism. Pope's *Essay on Man*, more or less dictated by Bolingbroke, represented the eighteenth century rationalism. Young's *Night Thoughts*, as he boasted, was meant to supply the desirable corrective. He meditated among the tombs, as a great many Englishmen had done before him, but professed to find consolation in the revealed truths which were ignored in Pope's philosophy. Hervey took up the strain in the prose *Meditations*, which, I fancy, have still a kind of faded vitality. The *Night Thoughts* gained extraordinary popularity in France at a later period, and chiefly, as M. Texte thinks, because readers saturated with Rousseauism were



prepared to accept any kindred sentimentalism. The relationship, anyhow, implies also a curious difference. Rousseau and Rousseau's followers held forms of religious belief which would have set Richardson's hair on end. Probably he would have agreed with his friend Johnson that the proper way of dealing with Rousseau was by a sentence of transportation. Richardson's discontent with the dominant ideals might be compared to that of Dickens, whose sentimentalism delighted the same class, and was met by the heartless sneers (so he thought them) of cold-blooded people in clubs and drawing-rooms. But, in English conditions, this did not imply any revolutionary outbreak, political or theological. The enthusiasm could still run in the old channels, and Richardson could still be a sound Tory and Churchman. Rousseau, on the other hand, was to become the mouthpiece of the most ardent revolutionists. Instead of promoting a religious revival in the British manner, he was to convert the revolutionary movement itself into a kind of new religion. Rationalism was not to be his enemy, but to be converted into a creed to be preached with all the fervour of a fresh gospel.

The difference corresponds to another contrast, of which M. Texte has something to say. If Shakespeare appeared to be half a lunatic to the


admirers of French tragedy, it was partly because he is so deeply impressed by the greatest riddles of human life—by the silences and the eternities, as Carlyle would say. The French drama, says M. Texte, held aloof from such thoughts; “where, in the plays of Racine and Corneille, are we to look for their philosophy?” They have nothing to say of the “problems which bring anguish to lofty souls.” This, he thinks, is because in France there was a divorce between secular and religious literature. The conventions of the French stage confined the drama to a sphere of emotion from which the profoundest poetical sentiments were excluded. It was certainly not that Frenchmen were insensible to such thoughts; but that they left them aside as belonging to the domain of the Church. Bossuet could preach upon the emptiness of worldly glory; and Pascal could be profoundly, even morbidly, sensible of the impotence of human reason and the worthlessness of human happiness. In the French pulpit, if not in the English, it was admittedly becoming that hell should be mentioned to “ears polite”; but the dramatist felt that in his surroundings the topic would be really inappropriate and savour of profanity. The remark is very suggestive, and, I think, may help to explain what it was that Rousseau really owed to Richardson. Rousseau

clearly was a sentimentalist in his own right; not because he had been infected by Richardson. His philosophy, again, wherever he learned it, was certainly not due to the worthy old printer. It had to express passions and emotions which were not allowed to find free utterance under the academic *régime*. So far, Richardson might give him a lead by his "plebeian" indifference to accepted canons of art. They had, so to speak, a common enemy. Richardson's revolt was comparatively easy, because the dominion against which he protested had never been very solidly founded. The English authors whom we call after Queen Anne represented our nearest, but still a temporary and half-hearted, approximation to the French conception. Swift tried to persuade his Tory friends to found an academy. The town wits who gathered in London coffee-houses made for the time such a circle as was required, and were fully prepared to accept an absolute code of literary orthodoxy, and, but for certain patriotic prejudices, to condemn as Gothic and barbarous everything that would have displeased a French critic. But this corresponded to a temporary phase; it was "un-English." We could never live up to an academy, and had no intolerable critical yoke to throw off. The literary, like the political, movement could there-

fore take place by gentle compromise instead of violent revolution. In France the classical rule had been stronger, and the explosion was proportionately forcible. It had forbidden men to speak upon the deepest subjects and provided no utterance for the passions which were beginning to demand open expression. The English precedent encouraged an advance, which soon went far beyond English limits. In the same way the political Anglomaniacs in France saw that in some things England was ahead of them, and aspired to transplant the British Constitution bodily. In literature, Rousseau was attracted by a style which was breaking with the old conventions, and was admired for its frank utterance of common sentiments and freedom in dealing with common objects and simple human emotions. He loved the "individualism" which meant an expression of a man's natural feelings without deference to pretentious authority. But in politics Anglo-mania turned out to be an impossible compromise, and in literature the new spirit introduced by Rousseau came into alliance with a radical revolt against the old order. Cowper in England impressed his sentimentalism in terms of Evangelical religion; but Rousseau made a religion out of the rights of man.

If this be true, as, at least, it is tolerably

commonplace, we must surely modify the statement of Rousseau's influence. Clearly he learned something from England, but what he learned was mainly encouragement to express more directly sentiments which he had learned from nobody outside of himself. We might rather say that he assimilated just what was cosmopolitan in the English movement, and rejected whatever was really national. A curious illustration of the same process might be found in the singular popularity of Ossian. The Ossianic enthusiasm is one of the most remarkable of literary phenomena. Goethe admired Ossian; Chateaubriand translated him; Napoleon revelled in Ossian; Madame de Staël, equally enthusiastic, considers Ossian as a typical example of the influence of the Northern spirit. I will not say that Ossian—or so much of him as appeared in Macpherson—was a mere humbug. But I may say, without incurring much risk of critical wrath, that I cannot read him. Nobody can read him. Wordsworth, as we know, was disgusted with his unreal mountains; and his scenery strikes one, so far as it strikes one at all, like so much "carpenter's Gothic." It is a mere sham, and, in fact, it never produced any very assignable effect upon English literature. Yet the impression which it made upon people of highest intelligence is a fact, and ought to be explained.



It seems to show, as some other cases show, that popularity abroad may be unaffected by, if not exactly due to, faults which are fatal at home. The reader of a translation is not shocked by defects of style apparent to the native, and gets general impressions in the lump. Wordsworth was offended because Ossian's mountains were not the real thing; only what a Cockney might see through a Scottish mist. But Chateaubriand was content with a "mountain" in the abstract, and supplied details for himself. Ossian's mountains might be mere scene-painting. When Scott or Wordsworth gave genuine likenesses, Ossian's were seen to be intolerable blurs. That made no difference to people who simply wanted what Mr. Ruskin described as the "mountain gloom." A vague daub answered the purpose as well as Turner's most powerful drawing of the reality. May we not say the same of the sentiment itself? Was it really specifically Northern, or simply eighteenth century, characteristic of the period, and common to the Germanic and the Latin races? This, indeed, suggests another question. Matthew Arnold argues that the effect of Ossian was due to the specially Celtic sentiment, which survived even through Macpherson's manipulation. Madame de Staël and most contemporaries were indifferent to such niceties. For them, the Northern races

were a unit; Celt and Scandinavian both lived in the North, and represent bogs and moors and wind-swept seas in general. Gray complained of Mason for mixing Scandinavian scalds with Celtic bards, but the distinction was scarcely recognised by less learned scholars. M. Texte, of course, is well aware that the English are not a single race. He would feel it more keenly, perhaps, if he were a poor Anglo-Saxon whose thick-headed incapacity for wit, humour, fancy, or imagination is being daily impressed upon him by his Irish friends. This, however, becomes a real difficulty in "ethnological" theories of literature. If Ossian represents the Celt as distinguished from, and not as merely one of, the Northern races, will not theories as to the influence of Germanic and Latin races require modification? If Matthew Arnold's view be accepted, it would apparently follow that race differences are so indelible that centuries of close contact cannot obliterate them. If all Northern races are alike in so far as they are all "children of the mist," can these qualities be really transmitted till London fogs have occupied Paris?

I do not presume to treat such questions. I confine myself to a simpler point. The "cosmopolitan" movement, in one sense, needs no exposition. That Europe is becoming a unit for

scientific purposes, or that the great changes which we generally sum up as democratic affect all civilised countries, is too obvious to be insisted upon. But does this imply a corresponding unity of art and literature; a fusion of different types, and an influence of Northern, for example, upon Southern races? That is where I hesitate. Critics trace the growth of "sentimentalism," "romanticism," "love of nature," and so forth; they show their acuteness by recognising early symptoms of each type; and then speak as though its first representative had made a discovery of a new product as a chemist discovers a gas which nobody had ever before perceived. Rousseau, or somebody else, has then the credit of all the subsequent developments, as Watt gets the credit of the steam-engine. Each new critic pushes the origin a little further back, because in reality there is no origin, but only a gradual change of form. The real process seems to me to be very different. "Sentimentalism" was due, I should guess, to the truly "cosmopolitan" movement: to the social, political, and philosophical changes which were common to all Europe. The emotions, of course, are as old as human nature; they only required a new form of utterance. Rousseau, as abnormally sensitive to the great impulses of the time, was bound to find some appropriate form, and in the



*Nouvelle Héloïse* he imitated Richardson, the man who under English conditions had already made a step in the same direction. But then, he did not appropriate what was English in Richardson, but only what was cosmopolitan; or, rather, the specifically English element was soon thrown off, and the genuine French characteristics speedily reappeared. The Anglomania in literature and in society corresponds, that is, to a fashion essentially superficial and transitory. Anglomania, we are told, was rampant in France before the Revolution; it made "appalling progress"; it tended to replace the "social spirit" by "individualism." Frenchmen read Shakespeare; drank tea; dressed like jockeys; imported race-horses; set up English clubs, and had *assemblées à l'anglaise* destructive of the old French *salon*. As Fox observed, the imitation was equally ridiculous on both sides of the Channel. It was ridiculous, because superficial. We know perfectly well that to land at Calais was then—as it is even now to some degree—to find one's self in a new world, with radically different manners, religion, politics, institutions, and ways of thinking. A Frenchman might put on top-boots and keep a bull-dog without being really one bit the more a genuine John Bull. He was only masquerading—a mere stage caricature, whose likeness to the original



was skin-deep. The whole phenomenon represented a passing enthusiasm, resting, to a great degree, on a total misunderstanding, and without any real roots in the soil. So British aristocrats sympathised at first with the French Revolution, and French reformers admired the British Constitution, precisely on account of the utter ignorance on both sides of the real significance of the foreign state of things. Was it not really the same in literature? Richardson and Young and Ossian could be admired, although they were English; and admiration for them and others suggested a fashion of imitation which implied no real appreciation of the peculiarly English qualities. Regarded in this way, it seems to me that a moral might be drawn which would be different from M. Texte's. Rousseau shows how one nation may take a hint from another; but shows also how the different national characteristics act as a non-conducting medium. They allow the "cosmopolitan" or congenial element to pass freely, as the Röntgen rays pass through an opaque body; but to the really national element they are obstinately non-transparent. He shows not so much the blending of two types as the persistence of each, even when brought into close external contact.

If there be any truth in this, it applies to M.

Texte's final moral. He observes that there is a danger of literature becoming too cosmopolitan. The distinctive qualities in which French literature has been supereminent may disappear; and if something is gained for science, much may be lost for art. At present, indeed, we do not seem to be rapidly approaching the period at which patriotism will be lost in universal philanthropy. When the "parliament of man" has been elected by the "federation of the world" it will be time enough to make up our minds as to the gain and loss. The real danger is, to my mind, a little different. It is quite true that the modern author does his best to be in one way cosmopolitan. He goes about the world searching for new sensations. If an original writer arises in France or Germany, Russia or Norway, he is translated and imitated, and has his sect of fervent admirers in every other civilised country. That, no doubt, represents a very different state of things from the old order, under which each vernacular literature grew up utterly unconscious of the existence of others, or even from the order in which a small body of critics could lay down a code of absolute laws and keep to the elaboration of a single type. In spite of that, it may be that the national taste will still assert itself. We plant, it is true, all manner of exotics, but only a few take root, and those in



virtue of their suitability to our soil. But if the vision of our political Jeremiahs is to be fulfilled; if the inevitable growth of democracy means a growing uniformity and growing vulgarisation of the human being everywhere; if it implies, too, an indefinite multiplication of masses, in which the individual is insignificant, occupied by the same petty round of interests, and incapable of appreciating refinement or high intellectual powers, there can be no doubt that literature also will become commonplace and vulgar, and so far alike throughout the world. There may be reasons for thinking that, in point of fact, there is a strong temptation for men of genius to write down to a low level and produce literary shoddy instead of thorough works of art. It may be, on the other hand, that democratic literature may represent wider sympathies and more genuine enthusiasms. But this opens problems far wider than any mere literary criticism can approach; as, indeed, the scientific critic, if such a person is to come into existence, would be the first to admit that it is impossible to explain literary changes if the literary movement be taken by itself as an isolated phenomenon.





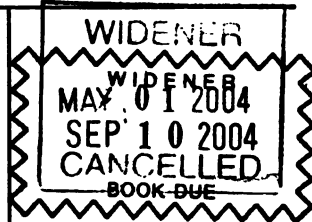




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